



*THE STORY OF THE  
ARAB LEGION*





The author and an Arab Legion sentry  
outside the Royal Palace in Amman

# *THE STORY OF THE ARAB LEGION*

*By*

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TO THE  
OFFICERS AND MEN  
OF THE  
ARAB LEGION

*My Brothers in Arms*



## INTRODUCTION

**I** HAVE intentionally called this book the story, and not the history, of the Arab Legion. I cannot claim the dignity of an historian. Firstly through lack of capacity for the part; secondly because, being still in active employment, I have had little time for the quiet research essential to the writing of history; and thirdly because I am still in Government service, and am thus debarred from the discussion of politics or controversial subjects.

My story has to some extent assumed the form of a personal narrative. Thus the progress of the Arab Legion from its first formation in 1921 until I joined it in 1930 has been treated briefly; not because this period was unimportant but simply because I was not there and so cannot speak of it from first-hand knowledge. The Arab Army of the First World War was the creation of the Amir Feisal, T. E. Lawrence and other officers, Arab and British. Its heir, the Arab Legion properly so-called, was created and commanded by Peake Pasha. Nothing I have been able to do for the Arab Legion could have been accomplished if it had not been for the work of my predecessors.

The majority of Englishmen who land in the Middle East believe the Arabs to be a backward race not yet civilized, and are unaware of the fact that the Arab Empire of the eighth century was relatively more powerful than the British Empire today, and that Arab domination lasted longer than the time during which the British Empire has been in existence. The Arabs are as conscious of their Imperial past as are the Romans or the Greeks, and people who imagine them to be a race as yet uncivilized cannot form an accurate picture of the Arab mentality.

For this reason, I have ventured to begin my story with a brief summary of the first Arab conquests. Obviously this chapter does not contain any new historical facts, its object being only to give the general reader a brief sketch of the historical background. Moreover, the whole of my story deals principally with Arabs as

fighters, and thus the historical summary also deals only with their military exploits. No attempt has been made to describe the administrative, legal, scientific or artistic aspects of the Golden Age of Arab history.

Finally, a word of explanation is necessary on the subject of Arab tribes. The English cartoonist has accustomed us to visualize the Arab as a rather lanky individual with a long black beard, riding a camel over an endless flat plain with a single palm-tree in the middle of it. Even the more initiated are still inclined to believe that a great proportion of the Arab race consists of wild nomads living in tents. Such a picture is greatly distorted. Reliable census figures classifying the inhabitants by their occupations do not exist in most Arab countries, but it is probable that not more than one-tenth of the Arabs belong to nomadic tribes. The majority of the Arab race, today, are villagers engaged in agriculture. Even the city dwellers are probably more numerous than the bedouins.

It is true that in Turkish times the bedouins possessed an importance out of proportion to their numbers. This was due to the fact that the Turks were never able to control them, and that the bedouins were able to terrorize the remainder of the population and hold them to ransom. They were enabled to do this by their mobility in the desert, due to the fact that they rode on camels. Living in the desert which was impenetrable to the other communities of the population, the bedouins were able to appear suddenly from over the horizon, loot a village and vanish once more into the desert before the villagers could organize resistance or the Government forces reach the scene. The Turks never succeeded in organizing an armed force capable of pursuing the bedouins into the desert and bringing them to book.

Soon after the First World War, however, it became apparent that motor transport could move freely over most of the Arabian deserts, while aircraft could of course follow the tribes for hundreds of miles in as many hours. Thus the tables were suddenly turned on the bedouins. Mobility had been the key to their former successes, and it was precisely the greater mobility of modern armed forces which put an end to bedouin power.

Ever since the 1920's, therefore, the bedouins have ceased to

possess any serious political importance in most Arab countries. The situation, of course, varies in different countries. In Saudi Arabia the bedouins form a comparatively large proportion of the population, whereas in Lebanon there are no bedouins at all.

The fact that a great part of this book is devoted to bedouins and the desert should not, therefore, be taken to mean that they are today politically important. They are not. But it so happens that much of my work has lain amongst bedouins, and this story is largely a personal narrative. Moreover, although the bedouin community has ceased to possess much political influence, the bedouins as individuals make excellent military material, and large numbers of them enlist in the Arab Legion. From the military point of view also, the bedouins occupy a considerable part of this book. I may perhaps be thought to have laboured this point unnecessarily, but it is my object to convey to the English reader an accurate, if limited, picture of Arab life, and I am aware that the British public is already inclined to attribute too much political importance to the bedouins.

The position of the bedouin tribes today may to some extent be likened to that of the Highland clans of Scotland. In every war in which Britain has been engaged for two hundred years, Highland regiments have played a leading part, but opinion in the Highlands cannot be said to exercise much influence at Westminster.

So much for the influence of the bedouin tribes on the present-day politics of Arabia. In other directions, however, they possess a significance of their own, for they still bear a close resemblance to those formidable warriors who, thirteen hundred years ago, bore the banners of the Faithful to the Punjab and the Pyrenees. In them also we find the most typical surviving examples of that purely Arab way of life, which, amongst other Arab communities, has become to a greater or lesser degree diluted by mixture with foreign influences. But all these aspects of their life are dealt with more fully in the book itself.

Meanwhile, however, the Arab tribes themselves are changing. Raiding is virtually a thing of the past. In the future, increasing numbers of Arabs will be engaged in agriculture, industry or other occupations closely resembling the way of life of their European counterparts. The modernization of Arabia will, doubt-



less, lead to higher standards of material comfort, education, public health and modern services. At the same time, however, it will destroy many of the peculiarities of the country and people, and will bring it largely into uniformity with other countries of the modern world. The fathers of the tribal leaders of today jousted against one another with lances. Their sons are studying for degrees in medicine or mechanical engineering at the universities of Britain and America.

Thus this book not only gives a picture of a fraction of Arabia in space, it is also a photograph of a period in time—a period which is already passing.

The Arab scene today is one of enthralling interest. The renaissance of so ancient an Imperial race and their struggles to overtake the modern world, their perplexity regarding what to adopt and what to reject in European culture, their passion and enthusiasm for education and their experiments in politics and government, provide an absorbing study for the philosopher, the sociologist and the historian. At the same time, the charm of the Arabs themselves, their ready humour, their high sense of honour and the warmth with which they return the friendship of those who learn to like them can scarcely fail in the end to win our love.

My greatest wish for this book is that it may convey to my fellow-countrymen, who, less fortunate than myself, have not had the opportunity to meet the Arabs at first hand, some slight idea of the charm, the courage and the humour of this great people.

But before all else, this work is intended as a tribute to the individual to whom I have owed so much happiness in my life, to whom is due the credit for anything I may have achieved and any reputation I may have won. I offer it as a contribution towards the debt which I owe him, but which I shall never be able fully to repay. The man to whom that debt is due is the Arab Soldier.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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My thanks are due to Mr. Frank Hurley, of 196 Mowbray Road, Willoughby, Sydney, Australia, for his kind permission to use so many of his magnificent photographs. I am also indebted to Mr. W. A. Stewart, late of the Palestine Government Education Department, who has allowed me to reproduce photographs of his paintings.

During the course of twenty-seven years in the Arab countries, I have accumulated a great number of photographs. Some of these are prints given to me by tourists, visitors or friends whose names I have not always recorded. A number of the illustrations in this book are from photographs in my possession, the owners of which I cannot trace. If any of my readers should recognize their pictures reproduced without their permission, I hope that they will believe me that the discourtesy has been involuntary.

So much for those who have assisted me in producing this book. But there would never have been a book if there had not first been an Arab Legion, and the Arab Legion would not be what it is if it had not enjoyed the help, co-operation and support of a great number of British officers. The officers and men of the Arab Legion are the first to acknowledge this obligation.

From successive Commanders-in-Chief in the Middle East during the war years, the Arab Legion invariably received generous and often enthusiastic support. From Field-Marshal Lord Wavell, General Sir Claude Auchinleck and Field-Marshal Lord Alexander the Arab Legion received cordial help and unfailing

sympathy. But, above all, we were indebted to Field-Marshal Lord Wilson and General Sir Bernard Paget, whose longer periods of office as Commanders-in-Chief enabled them to enter fully into our problems and to contribute nobly to their solution.

A catalogue of all the British officers who contributed from first to last to build up the Arab Legion would be too long to include here, and I am therefore obliged to thank, without mentioning their names, all those British officers who served with the Arab Legion during the war. Perhaps I may be allowed particularly to mention the work done by Brigadier J. E. Baird, Colonel R. J. C. Broadhurst, who is still with us, and Colonel G. W. Bell, now of the Sudan Civil Service. Without such helpers, a great part of our efforts would have been in vain.

I cannot refrain also from publicly expressing my thanks to two successive Commanders of the Trans-Jordan Frontier Force—Colonel P. Wilson and Colonel G. W. C. Montgomery.

In June 1946 a contingent of the Arab Legion went to London for the Victory Parade. Arabs are justly famous for their hospitality, and their standard in this respect is a high one. But England, even on war-time rations, rose to the occasion. Some of those who entertained the Arab Legion so nobly had themselves served in the force. Such were Colonel Sir Philip Brocklehurst and Major Lord Amherst. Others, like Field-Marshal Lord Birdwood, did not know us before. General Sir E. Spears is always ready in the cause of Anglo-Arab friendship. Many others, too numerous to mention, welcomed this first Arab Legion contingent to England.

The rest of this book deals almost entirely with Arabs. But I know that before I begin to speak of them, my Arab comrades would wish me first of all to acknowledge what we owe to British friendship and help. In their name, I say to all our English friends—thank you!

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# I

## *The Martial Race*

“ Let us now praise famous men . . .  
Men renowned for their power . . .  
There be of them that have left a name behind them  
That their praises might be reported.  
And some there be that have no memorial.  
Who are perished as though they had never been born;  
And their children after them.”

ECCLESIASTICUS.





## THE MARTIAL RACE

I WAS commissioned in the Royal Engineers in April 1915, having completed an abbreviated war course at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich. I spent the First World War in France and Belgium, with intervals in hospital. After four years of war, the barrack square at Chatham was more than monotonous. It was, therefore, with something of a throb of excitement that I read, in the summer of 1920, that officers were needed as volunteers to go to Iraq. The Arabs of that country were in revolt. Here was a prospect of more fighting, and all the excitement and interest of adventure and a strange country. I volunteered and was accepted.

Most of the fighting was over before I arrived. I spent the winter in a blockhouse on the Persian frontier, and the summer of 1921 on the Middle Euphrates, at Ramadi and Fellujah. There was little to do, and I bought a pony and commenced to explore the country and visit the riverain tribes. Amongst other duties, I was responsible for a pontoon bridge over the River Euphrates below Ramadi. To maintain the bridge, I had a gang of local tribesmen of the Duleim.

One morning in the spring of 1921, I found the whole west bank of the Euphrates near the bridge-head transformed overnight. The fields and date gardens were swarming with a new and strange community. Groups of men sat on the dusty ground in circles round a tiny fire on which stood a blackened coffee-pot. Over other fires crouched women baking bread. Strips of black tents had been hastily pulled over sacks of grain and rolls of carpets, so that the owners could crawl under cover at night without the trouble of erecting the tents. Here and there flocks of black long-haired sheep stood in frightened groups facing outwards in all directions. But over and above all were camels. The country seemed alive with camels as far as the eye could see.

The plain swarmed with a closely packed moving crowd like Epsom downs on Derby day, but the crowd consisted more of camels than people.

When I reached the bridge-head, I looked for the foreman of my gang, an enormous Duleim tribesman called Mohammed al Koodi. He was standing like Horatius in the middle of the roadway, barring the entrance to the bridge. These people he told me were Shammar, the followers of some prince of Central Arabia called Ibn Rasheed.<sup>1</sup> Their ruler had been conquered and his domains annexed by a rival prince. I was entirely ignorant of Arabian history and geography, but it was impossible not to be struck by the scene before me.

As I spoke to Mohammed al Koodi in my few words of broken Arabic, a tall bearded figure rose from a group of men sitting in the shade of some date palms fifty yards away. He was dressed in a white cotton shirt which reached from his throat to his feet. Over his shoulders he wore a brown cloak. A silver-mounted sword hung at his side, carried by a thick scarlet cord which passed over his shoulder. He was followed by two black African slaves, dressed in brightly coloured but somewhat frayed robes. "Peace be upon you!" said this commanding figure in stentorian tones.

For five days the Shammar flowed in a constant stream across the bridge—five of the most strenuous but absorbing days of my life. Before my eyes passed in review a complete pageant of that nomad life which had not changed in its essentials since the days of Abraham, but which was so soon to pass away. An almost unending procession of tanned men's faces, framed by long ringlets like those worn by the young ladies of the Victorian age. Horses stepped daintily on to the bridge with fine muzzles, arching necks and tails carried high—the breed from which in the past were drawn the ancestors of the thoroughbreds of the world. On their backs sat riders in dirty cloaks frayed at the edges, their bare feet swinging by their horses' flanks. They looked unkempt and ragged to English eyes, but they managed their horses with unconscious ease, riding only on a pad without stirrups and using a rope on a

<sup>1</sup> The Arabic word *Ibn* which occurs in so many names means "Son of," as do the prefixes *Mac-* or *Fitz-* in English. Thus, names like *Ibn Rasheed* or *Ibn Saud* are similar in construction to *MacDonald* or *Fitzherbert*.

head-collar in place of bit and reins. Some carried long lances decorated with ostrich feathers, but the majority had rifles slung on their backs.

At other times came great camel litters, wooden crescent-shaped frameworks hung all over with carpets, tassels, white shells and blue beads. They seemed to lurch uncomfortably from side to side. Now and then the face of a smiling girl would peer out from behind the curtains.

The whole pageant was dominated by camels. One by one the great herds would pace slowly up to the bridge-head. There is no shade in the desert for hundreds of miles, and the slow heavy camels would pause or shy ponderously at the unaccustomed shadows of the date palms. On reaching the head of the bridge the whole flock would pause, pushing and jostling against one another. Long necks were stretched out suspiciously, staring eyes gazed vacantly at the swift-flowing Euphrates and the frail wooden bridge. Then from the front of the herd, an old, rather moth-eaten-looking camel would tread slowly forward on to the planks of the bridge. A boy of twelve or fourteen would be lying flat on his stomach along her back, his cotton "night-shirt" tucked up to his hips, his tousled hair over his face. Advancing ten yards along the bridge, the old camel would stop, and look contemptuously at the swift Euphrates twirling and spinning below the frail planks of the bridge.

Then the herdsman, in a shrill voice, would give his call: "Way-oh! Way-oh! Way-oh! Hei! Hei! Hei!"

The jostling herd at the bridge-head would quieten. One long neck after another would rise, the thin head turning slowly to listen. Yes, that was the familiar voice! Then suddenly the whole herd would press forward towards that voice and on to the bridge. In a second the old camel was tearing across the frail planks, the herd-boy bouncing on her back. Behind her charged a solid phalanx of enormous animals, the outside ones leaning in at an angle of sixty degrees, pushing their neighbours to prevent themselves being pushed into the stream. The plank decking of the bridge clapped up and down, the pontoons sank to their gunwales as the charge passed over them, and then shot up again as the weight passed on. Behind the herd ran two or three men, the sweat

running down their faces, their shirts tucked up like kilts. Sometimes one of the great camels would crash through the handrails and fall headlong into the river, throwing a fountain of diamond drops against the blue sky. In an instant, three or four lithe figures were on the bridge, their white shirts were over their heads and the brown muscular bodies were diving into the river. They were after the camel with long powerful over-arm strokes, their black hair apparently done up in curling-pins like a Dickens landlady. I was used to the fact that the river tribes could swim like fish, but how nomads from the waterless desert had learned to do so I could not imagine.

For five days the pageant continued. The lumbering flocks, the cantering horsemen, the swaying litters, the deep voices, the veiled faces of which only the eyes were visible. Then the last flock was over, the last of the swaying litters and lean horsemen disappeared once more into the shimmering mirage of the desert to the east of the river.

The impression left on my mind was profound, but would doubtless have worn off in a few months if fortune had not placed in my hands a number of books. I had received, or perhaps suffered, an English education. My knowledge of history was almost limited to the story of England from 1066 to George V. Of the Byzantine and Arab empires I had scarcely heard. As I bought books and more books, and read and reread them, a new and fascinating world was opened to my eyes. I discovered that the ancestors of these men I had seen had overthrown empires and conquered half the civilized world. They had ruled an empire as extensive as that of Rome, and which endured longer than that of Britain.

The pageant of Shammar crossing Ramadi bridge, and the reading and study to which it led me, decided the course of my life. Familiarity with the Arabs' imperial history changed my career. The memory of their past glory permeates the Arab scene today. It was their history which was later to make possible the spirit which inspired the Arab Legion. To understand the background to my story, it is essential for the reader also to have some idea of the proud heritage which fills the minds of the Arabs today.

On June 16th, A.D. 622<sup>1</sup>, a merchant of Mecca fled from his native city and took refuge in the neighbouring town of Yathrib, since better known as Medina. Muhammad the son of Abdulla had made himself unpopular by preaching monotheism in Mecca, at the time an important centre of idol-worship. The people of Medina welcomed the Prophet and supported him against the Mecca factions. Before his death ten years later he had reduced virtually all the tribes of Central Arabia to his authority, and had sown the seeds of a religious movement which was to shake the world to its foundations. After the Prophet's death, some of the tribes, it is true, attempted to break away and to return to their traditional condition of anarchy. But Abu Bekr, the first Khalif or successor of the Prophet, met the crisis with resolution. Punitive columns were despatched all over Arabia, and all compromise with the rebels was rejected. In the extraordinarily short time of one year, the rebellious tribes were utterly routed as far afield as the shores of the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. The speed and completeness with which the tribes were reduced to subjection (the distance covered by the punitive columns is in itself remarkable even if no fighting had taken place) give a clear indication that the spirit which inspired the Companions of the Prophet was of a different order from that which ordinarily animated the tribesmen in their interminable feuds and forays.

The Arab historians report that, during his lifetime, the Prophet sent communications to the Byzantine Emperor and the King of Persia simultaneously, urging upon each of them the adoption of the religion of Islam. The rulers of the two greatest empires of their time could scarcely be expected to comply with the orders of the Prophet of wild Arabia. Indeed, the only thing more amazing than this challenge is the fact that the followers of the Prophet made it good.

The Arab historians say that the members of the deputation sent to Heraclius, the Byzantine Emperor, were murdered on the way home, somewhere in the country now known as Trans-Jordan. Whether out of revenge for this incident or not, the first Muslim campaign into foreign territory was organized shortly afterwards. In A.D. 630 a raiding party of 3,000 Arabs under

<sup>1</sup> See map inside front cover.

Ja'far al Tayyar encountered a Byzantine force at the village of Mota, a few miles from the modern town of Kerak. The Muslims were utterly defeated and Ja'far al Tayyar was killed. The remnants of the raiding party were extricated by the gallantry of Khalid ibn al Waleed, of whom the world was to hear more.

This incident can scarcely have impressed the Byzantine Empire, which must have regarded it as little more than the usual frontier raid to which countries bordering on the desert were always exposed.

The Prophet was still alive at the time of this reverse, and ordered the immediate preparation of a second raiding party, more numerous than the first. The expedition was about to set out when the Prophet's death threw everything into confusion, and the greater part of the tribes of Arabia rose in revolt. But Abu Bekr, the Prophet's successor, refused to cancel orders formerly issued by his dead master, and the greater part of the Muslim army set out for Trans-Jordan, leaving Arabia in rebellion behind it. The force ravaged the country without apparently encountering a Roman army.

Scarcely had the rebellion of the Arabian tribes been suppressed than a more formidable army set out to attack the Roman dominions in A.D. 634. With it were many names destined to acquire historical fame—Amr ibn Al A'sas, the future conqueror of Egypt; Yazid ibn Abi Sufyan, whose son Mu'awiya was to found a dynasty of Emperors in Damascus; and Abu Ubaida, later to be commander-in-chief. The Roman Patrician of Palestine, Sergius, was defeated in a battle in the Wadi Araba and retired in confusion on Northern Palestine. But this time the Muslims did not return to Medina with their plunder. Four years had elapsed since the first defeat of the Arabs at Mota, and Heraclius the Roman Emperor was now thoroughly alarmed. He collected a great army under his brother Theodorus, and despatched it to meet the Muslims south of Damascus. The Arabs, somewhat daunted by reports of these immense preparations, sent back to the Khalif in Medina for reinforcements.

The commonest prudence or diplomacy would have taught the Muslims to have made friendly advances to one of the great empires of the time, while devoting their efforts to the conquest

of the other. The Arabs of the early conquests disdained such expedients and attacked the Empires of Byzantium and Persia simultaneously. While the western armies were confronting the Romans in the plains before Damascus, Khalid ibn al Waleed was skirmishing with the outposts of the Persian Empire. He had already captured two cities when he received urgent orders from the Khalif to abandon the Persian war and to reinforce the Muslim army which was confronting Damascus.

Khalid was separated from his comrades in Syria by 500 miles of the Syrian desert, a space which, with one exception, has never since been crossed by an army during a campaign. The feat was repeated in 1941 by a British column to which the Arab Legion acted as advanced guard. Khalid set out without delay and travelled across the desert to the oasis of Duma (now called Al Jauf). From thence the Wadi as Sirhan, a long depression containing great numbers of wells, opened a highway before him to Syria. But this was precisely the route always used by caravans and travellers, and was commanded at its northern end by Roman forts. Watering at Garagir (a well still in existence under the same name), he swung to the east into the open desert, and then marched north and was lost to sight by the defenders of Syria.

The Byzantine army was facing the Arabs on the plains south of Damascus, when Khalid suddenly appeared from the desert in their rear. Such mobility was too much for the heavily armoured Byzantine troops. Their Arab auxiliaries, the Ghassanid princes, were sent to drive Khalid from their lines of communication, but they suffered a severe repulse some fifteen miles east of Damascus city. Khalid disappeared into the desert once more, and moving round the south of what is now called the Jebel Druze, he joined the Muslim army on the plains south of Damascus.

Khalid's march from Iraq and his raid on the Byzantine communications near Damascus were true bedouin strategy. For thousands of years the bedouin have terrorized the settled inhabitants, as the Scandinavian pirates did the coasts of Britain and France. For the desert was like a sea, and the Arab tribes possessed in their camels the only ships. The sudden descent on a rich plain or group of villages, the wild attack and plunder, and the



equally rapid disappearance over the desert horizon were the time-honoured style of bedouin attack.

The junction of Khalid with the main army was effected in July 634, and the Byzantine army suffered a heavy defeat at Ajnadain, and again at Merj as Suffar in February 635. In September 635, Damascus, which the Prophet had compared to an earthly paradise, opened its gates to the victorious Arabs, after a six months' siege.

But the aged Emperor Heraclius decided to make one more effort to save his fairest province. He entrusted an army of 50,000 men to his brother Theodorus. Reports of the force which was preparing to advance against them caused the Muslims to abandon the city of Damascus, and to fall back to the banks of the Yermouk stream, which today forms the boundary between Syria and Trans-Jordan. This position enabled them the more rapidly to receive reinforcements from Arabia or to retire into the desert in the event of defeat.

On August 20th, 636, the battle was joined. The heavy armoured Roman cavalry at first broke through and overran the Arabs. But the heat of August and a dust-laden wind exhausted the Greeks and Syrians before the bedouins. The Muslims confessed that the battle was the longest and the most severe which they had yet endured. But the result was completely decisive. Theodorus was killed, the Imperial army annihilated and Syria was irrevocably surrendered to Islam.

The Byzantine army never again disputed with the Arabs the ownership of Syria. Jerusalem held out for two years after the battle of the Yermuk. The last Greek city, the coast town of Cæsarea, where Paul 600 years before had been tried before Felix, resisted until A.D. 640. The conquest of Syria was completed seven years after the death of the Prophet.

It has already been related how Khalid went to attack the Persian Empire in A.D. 634 while the principal Arab armies were advancing into Syria. Before he could carry the campaign further, he was ordered to reinforce the army of Syria, which was threatened by the forces of Theodorus. For two years operations languished in the Iraq theatre, but in August 636 the Roman army

in Syria was finally destroyed at the battle of the Yermouk. The Khalif decided immediately to proceed with the campaign against Persia, and a new army was sent to the Euphrates.

On June 1st, 637, the army of the Great King was engaged by the Muslims at Qadisiyah, on the west bank of the Euphrates. The struggle was long and obstinate, but resulted, in the third day, in the complete overthrow of the Persians. The Arabs were not slow to pursue the defeated enemy, and within less than a month they had captured Ctesiphon, the capital of the Persian Empire. Yezdegerd III, grandson of the Great Chosroes, fled ignominiously for the mountains. Three years were expended in bringing Iraq into complete subjection. Arab military colonies were established at Kufa and Basra. A final stand was made by the Persians in 641 at Nehavend in Persia proper, but resulted only in what the Arabs styled the victory of victories. The grandson of Chosroes, the heir to the throne of Darius, appealed for help to the Emperor of China, but was treacherously murdered by one of his own soldiers.

The irresistible advance of the Arabs continued. In 641 they captured Mosul, and in 643 the subjection of Baluchistan brought them to the borders of India. In the north they were pressing into Armenia; through Hamadan and Ispahan, and then onwards again to the Caspian Sea. Eight years after the death of the Arab Prophet, his followers completed the overthrow of the Empire of Cyrus and Artaxerxes, which for 1,200 years had dominated a great part of the known world. In the space of eight years the gaunt bedouins of Arabia shattered an empire which for six centuries had successfully resisted the assaults of the Roman Empire.

The Khalif had come to Palestine in 638 to receive the surrender of Jerusalem, and had spent the following winter in Damascus. During this northern tour, he was approached by one of the most prominent of the Arab leaders, a companion of the Prophet, a devout Muslim and a brilliant leader—Amr ibn Al A's. He proposed to the Khalif the invasion and conquest of Egypt.

If Syria was the most beautiful province of the Byzantine Empire, Egypt was perhaps the wealthiest and the most populated. From a military point of view, the campaign presented

peculiar difficulties for the Arabs, whose methods of warfare were still those of the bedouin tribes. The Egyptian Delta, intersected with canals and studded with walled cities, was unsuited to the swift raid, the mounted skirmish or the whirlwind charges which constituted the tactical methods of the Muslims. The Khalif hesitated and promised to think it over, but before returning to Medina he authorized Amr ibn Al A's to set out. When it is remembered that the Byzantine Army at the battle of the Yermuk numbered 50,000 men, we can form some idea of the rashness of Amr, who set out to conquer the no less formidable province of Egypt with only 4,000 soldiers. In December 639, the gallant little party crossed the frontier between Palestine and Egypt at Al Arish.

Some idea of the military effort of the Arabs at this time may be gathered from the fact that, in this year 639, when Amr's 4,000 gallants were crossing the desert of Sinai, another Muslim army was still besieging the fortress of Cæsarea in Palestine, while the struggle with Persia was at its height. The final destruction of Persia at Nehavend was not to come until two years later.

The first Egyptian fortress encountered was the minor garrison of Pelusium, on the sea-shore, east of the present site of Port Said. The Arabs were unable to capture even this provincial outpost, and were obliged to camp impotently outside the walls for a month, a fact which boded ill for their success against the great fortified cities of the Delta. Fortunately the garrison indulged in a number of sorties, after the repulse of one of which the Arabs entered the gate with the retiring enemy and captured the town.

There was in the seventh century no canal joining the bitter lakes to the Mediterranean, and the Arabs, as in all their campaigns, preferred to move in the desert rather than enter the Delta. They turned southwards from Pelusium to near the modern Kantara. Moving south-west along the edge of the desert, they passed Tel el Kebir to the neighbourhood of Heliopolis. The modern city of Cairo did not at that time exist, but the fate of Egypt was to be decided on the site of the future capital. The area was covered with gardens, villas and churches. Down-stream on the east bank lay the great fortress of Babylon, named after the Mesopotamian capital of many centuries before.

The Roman defenders of Egypt at last took action, and Cyrus, the Imperial Viceroy and Patriarch, came from the capital at Alexandria to the fortress of Babylon, where an army was gathered under the leadership of Theodore, the Roman commander-in-chief. Amr and his band were in a precarious position.

With fewer than 4,000 men, he found himself skirting along the fringes of the desert, in face of a Roman army which must have been three or four times as strong, based on walled cities and fortresses which he was unable to attack. He wrote back to the Khalif to ask for reinforcements, and meanwhile resorted to the tactics adopted by bedouins for thousands of years. For though the Romans must have had ample strength to crush Amr's little force if they could catch him, they were far less mobile than the bedouins in the desert, and indeed they probably never left the cultivated area. We may conjecture, therefore, that Amr spent his time in the desert, indulging in tip-and-run raids on the flocks and property of the dwellers of the Delta. He even crossed the Nile in the vicinity of the site of modern Cairo, and keeping to the desert west of the river, occupied himself raiding the fertile province of Fayoum.

The Khalif had not been idle, and in June 640 the reinforcements sent from Arabia reached the neighbourhood of Heliopolis. They appear to have numbered about 12,000. Amr recrossed the Nile, joined the new reinforcements, and with an army of some 15,000 Muslims offered battle to the Romans at Heliopolis. Theodore with perhaps 20,000 Romans was six or seven miles away at Babylon on the banks of the Nile.

The battle may have taken place in the vicinity of the modern Cairo suburb of Abbassia. The main armies fought obstinately, but meanwhile Amr had detached two forces to outflank the enemy, one on the right and one on his left flank. At the height of the battle, the Romans found themselves attacked on their flanks and rear by wild bedouin charges. Disorder ensued and was soon transformed into flight. Many were killed by the frenzied Arabs, some fled back for refuge to the fortress of Babylon, while others scattered through the Delta. Part of the Arab army beleaguered Babylon, while detachments scoured the country and accepted the surrender of the provinces of Fayoum and the Upper Delta.

Meanwhile Cyrus, the Imperial Viceroy of Egypt, was himself shut up in the fortress of Babylon. While it is true that one battle had been lost, the Roman position was by no means hopeless. The inability of the Arabs to capture walled cities had already been proved. The eastern Mediterranean was entirely commanded by the Imperial fleet, and any number of reinforcements could be landed in Egypt from Byzantium. Nevertheless, the Imperial Viceroy seems to have been already intent on surrender. The terror inspired by the apparently invincible Arabs must have been more profound than we can imagine.

The Viceroy accordingly sent envoys to Amr to negotiate terms, but could only extort from him the invariable Muslim reply—conversion to Islam, or the payment of tribute. The Roman envoys were deeply impressed with the fervour of the Arabs—a mixture of religious enthusiasm and military pride. "We have seen," reported the messengers, "a people who prefer death to life and humility to pride. They sit in the dust, and they take their meals on horseback. Their commander is one of themselves; there is no distinction of rank among them." No one who has experienced the bedouins today can fail to be struck by the genuine ring of this description. The free and outspoken equality which characterizes the relations between the highest and the lowest among them, and the picture of them sitting on the dusty ground and eating their dates and dry bread as they ride along, are as accurate today as they were thirteen centuries ago.

The Viceroy was still intent on surrender, though many of the garrison of Babylon wished to resist. A treaty was drawn up by which the Romans undertook to pay tribute, but the agreement was made subject to the approval of the Emperor Heraclius. The fortress of Babylon was not to be surrendered until the receipt of the Emperor's confirmation. The Viceroy left for Alexandria to communicate with Byzantium.

But Heraclius, though himself at death's door, reacted violently to this disgraceful surrender. Cyrus was recalled and the treaty denounced. Called to defend his cowardice before the Emperor, the Viceroy is said to have pleaded that the Romans had no hope of resistance. The Arabs, he said, were not as other men. They had no earthly wants but bread for sustenance and a garment to cover

their bodies. They were a people of death, holding it gain to be killed and sent to Paradise, whereas the Romans loved the things of this world. If the Emperor saw the Arabs and knew their fighting powers, argued Cyrus, he would be forced to acknowledge that they were invincible.

With the rejection of the peace terms hostilities were renewed, but the Arabs, invincible indeed in the open desert, were unable to make any impression on the walls of Babylon. But soon after this last act of courage, on February 11th, 641, the aged Heraclius died. Confusion ensued in the court of Byzantium: the Emperor's two sons struggled for supremacy, army generals mutinied, and the green and blue factions of the circus broke into civil strife.

On April 6th, 641, the Muslims, who without skill in siege warfare were unable to breach the fortifications, scaled the walls with ladders during the night. At dawn the defenders surrendered, and were allowed to evacuate the fortress unmolested. The siege of Babylon had lasted for seven months.

The Arabs of the desert had found the months of siege in the damp atmosphere of the Nile river bank but little to their taste, and lost no time in taking the field once more. True to their usual tactics, they moved towards Alexandria by the desert west of the Delta. The Romans stood to fight on two occasions during the advance, but in both cases were defeated and compelled to continue their retreat.

Early in the summer of 641, the Arab army came in view of the vast walls, towers and pinnacles of Alexandria, then probably the finest city of the world, a city of columns, temples and churches, of gold and marble, of palaces and colonnades. Along the whole of the north side, the defences of the city were washed by the waters of the Mediterranean. Even on the land side, the walls throughout the greater part of their length were protected by lakes, marshes and canals. The Arabs would have had little hope of capturing a walled city of these dimensions, even if it had been situated in mid-desert. But Alexandria was a great sea-port, and the Byzantine fleet had complete command of the Mediterranean. Reinforcements or supplies could enter with impunity from the sea.

Meanwhile, as a result of the confusion following on the death

of Heraclius, the former Viceroy Cyrus was called back from disgrace and sent to Egypt a second time. Still apparently dominated by the idea of Arab invincibility, he immediately initiated negotiations for surrender. The treaty terminating, after six centuries, the Roman dominion over Egypt was signed on November 8th, 641. A few months before, the Persian Empire had been finally shattered at the battle of Nehavend.

This is not a history book, but I have ventured to begin it with some account of the early Muslim conquests in order to convey an idea of the past exploits of this martial race. Within nine years of the Prophet's death, the tribes of Arabia had utterly destroyed the 1,200-year-old Empire of Persia, and had driven to its knees and deprived of its wealthiest provinces the no less formidable Roman Empire of Byzantium.

The Arab conquest did not end at that. In the East they entered the Punjab, while in the West they conquered the whole of North Africa as far as Morocco. In A.D. 711, the Arabs crossed over the straits of Gibraltar, conquered Spain and passed the Pyrenees into France. In A.D. 732, one hundred years after the death of the Prophet, their hitherto invincible advance was checked at Tours, in Central France, by a Frankish Army under Charles Martel.

I have not elaborated these later campaigns, because as the Arab Empire grew and conversions to Islam became more numerous, the Muslim armies no longer consisted solely of tribesmen from Arabia. Nor, indeed, were the later campaigns so amazing or so swift. The first ten years after the Prophet's death can, however, be described as well-nigh miraculous. When the Prophet died, Arabia was without a political identity, whereas Byzantium and Persia were the two greatest powers in the known world, comparable to Britain, the U.S.A. and Russia today. Both empires were attacked and overthrown simultaneously in the course of nine years.

Alexander the Great had completed the conquest of almost the same area in about the same time, but he had inherited from his father the finest army in the world, and the Greeks had then for many years been recognized as the leading military race of the time. The Arabs began from nothing, with no trained army, no

experienced generals and no civil government to support and maintain them with equipment and pay.

The victories of Napoleon were no less spectacular, but when they began France had for 200 years been the first military power in Europe.

No campaigns in history other than those of Alexander or Napoleon can be compared with the exploits of the Arabs in the ten years after the Prophet's death. Yet these feats of arms were performed by them without scientific military training and without experienced commanders. We cannot but agree with the opinion of Gibbon that "the uniform ascent of the Arabian greatness must be ascribed to the spirit of the nation rather than the abilities of their chiefs."

One word more will complete the argument of this chapter. Many races have in the past enjoyed periods of conquest, during which their armies appeared invincible, their courage became proverbial and their very name struck terror into the lesser races with which they came into contact. But we seek in vain for these qualities in their descendants today, and are at a loss to decide whether foreign invasions have changed their race, their wars exhausted their energy or too great wealth and luxury enervated their virility. Suffice it that the heroic races of which we read in history are more often than not unrecognizable today.

The case of the Arab is in this respect unique. The Khalif Amr ibn Al Khattab himself described the bedouins as the raw material of Islam, and there can be no doubt that they were likewise the raw material of the conquests of these first ten years. But as the Empire became wider and richer and more international, the purely Arab tribal element became less conspicuous. Much of the quixotic recklessness of the Arab tribesmen was permanently enshrined in that Empire, but the personnel was increasingly recruited from non-Arabs—Persians, Africans, Spaniards, Turks. The Arab tribesmen of the first conquest married in the conquered territories, and their descendants of the second and third generation had ceased to be pure Arabs. The Central Arabian cauldron, which had once boiled over with such devastating effect, relapsed once more into itself. With the collapse of the Arab Empire in the thirteenth century, the Arab tribes cut themselves



off once more from the outside world, and continued behind their desert barriers to live the lives of their ancestors, and to fritter away in internal feuds and private jealousies those military virtues which had once terrified the ancient world. By this means the primitive character of the first soldiers of Islam was preserved almost unchanged for 1,200 years, so that in the bedouins today the student of history can recognize the warriors of Khalid and Amr.

The prejudice of European historians has for a thousand years refused to acknowledge the extraordinary nature of the Arab feats of arms. Today the scene is confused both by this old prejudice and by the ignorance of most Europeans of the true structure of modern Arabia.

The inhabitants of the Mediterranean littoral are the heirs of Greece and Rome as much as of the warriors of the desert. Their traditions of culture and civilization date back thousands of years before the rise of Islam. These were in their time the artists, the diplomats, perhaps the savants and statesmen, but not the warriors of the Arab empire.

Today the name of Arab is applied indiscriminately to the Lebanese scholar and the camel rider of Arabia. Little sympathy exists between the two. Neither has realized the potential power of an alliance between them—a combination of the suave and subtle intellectualism of the Mediterranean with the fiery gallantry of the desert. Should the two ever again be synthesized, something of the Arab glories of the eighth century may return.

## II

### *The Land of the Free*

"The slaves of domestic tyranny may vainly exult in their national independence: but the Arab is personally free."

GIBBON: *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.*



## THE LAND OF THE FREE

**W**HILE I was stationed at Ramadi, my tribal explorations and my efforts to learn Arabic drew the attention of Army Headquarters. In the spring of 1922 I was given a staff appointment. The tribes of the Middle and Lower Euphrates were notorious for their turbulence, and were only partially under control. In the summer of 1921, all British troops had been withdrawn from the country districts and concentrated in cantonments in the main cities. A few staff officers were left in country districts for liaison purposes. I was stationed with this object at Nasiriyah on the Lower Euphrates. In the ensuing two years I was able to improve my Arabic and my knowledge of the riverain tribes. I also made my first acquaintance with the nomads of the desert.

Those who today desire to explore the deserts of Africa or Arabia can do so by chartering an aircraft and returning each night to bathe and dine at their base. In 1922 the tradition of desert exploration by camel was still alive. I devoured the works of the explorers of Arabia—Burckhardt, Doughty, Blunt and Palgrave—and determined to imitate them. In 1924 I applied for two months' leave, to ride by camel from Iraq to Trans-Jordan across the 500 miles of the Syrian desert.

Today there would seem to be little of the adventurous in such a journey. A main tarmac road crosses the desert from Baghdad to Haifa. Beside it for a great part of the distance runs the Iraq Petroleum Company's pipeline, at intervals along which lie pumping stations, houses, gardens and electric light. In 1924 none of these things had been thought of. Moreover, the Governments concerned had not yet attempted to bring the desert under control, and the bedouins still migrated, raided and fought unmolested.

An impecunious subaltern could not afford an escort of armed

followers. I took with me only a single servant and we bought two inferior riding camels for £15 each from a tribal encampment near Ramadi. My expenses were limited to the purchase of these two camels and a cheap suit of Arab clothing.

The most striking attribute of the bedouin of twenty-five years ago was his bold frankness and democracy. Perhaps because he lived in a great open country, he more often than not spoke in a rather loud voice. He was no respecter of ranks or dignities, and addressed everybody by his first name. If he did not know it, he would accost the stranger in stentorian tones with the greeting, "Peace be upon you, O man!" In 1921, when King Feisal of Iraq paid his first visit to Ramadi, a number of tribesmen introduced to him greeted him without ceremony but with perfect urbanity as "O Feisal!"

This absence of ceremony held nothing of unseemly familiarity or bad taste. It was purely naïve. It had never occurred to the Arab tribesman that classes existed. A barefooted bedouin in a ragged cloak would walk up to a king, shake him by the hand and wish him good morning, completely disregarding the merriment or horror of the whispering courtiers.

Before the days of governments, the tribal chiefs fulfilled some of the tasks of administration. They made war and peace on behalf of their tribes; usually, it is true, preferring war. But to the defenceless traveller they provided protection from the depredations of their followers.

The Syrian desert between the Euphrates and the Wadi as Sirhan in Trans-Jordan is entirely occupied by Aneizah. So numerous is this tribe that it has itself split into several subdivisions under independent chiefs, who in those days were not infrequently at war with one another. Of these subdivisions, the Amarat occupied the eastern half of the desert and owed allegiance to Iraq. But the second half of our journey would take us across the area of the Ruwallah, who were subjects of Syria.

I decided to go first to the tent of Fahad ibn Hadhdhal, the great shaikh of the Amarat division of the Aneizah. So noble was Ibn Hadhdhal by descent that he was sometimes called the father of the Arabs. The great tribes of Aneizah had been in occupation of the Syrian desert for less than 200 years, having

migrated from Central Arabia. Before Ibn Hadhdhal, the greatest shaikh in the Syrian desert had been Ibn Jesham, who now lives in poverty on the Lower Euphrates.

It was, indeed, related that an Arab petitioner had once accosted His Majesty King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud by the title of Chief of the Arabs, but that the latter had protested: "I take refuge with God, my son! The Chief of the Arabs is Ibn Hadhdhal." With less than 200 years of rule to their credit, the Sauds were a new family to the Arabs.

When this story was repeated to Ibn Hadhdhal, he interrupted the narrator to object: "I take refuge with God, my son!" said the old chieftain. "The chief of the Arabs is Ibn Jesham." Such was the modest chivalry of these old chiefs, although all of them were at war with one another.

From Ibn Hadhdhal I obtained a letter to Al Nuri ibn Shaalan, chief of the Ruwallah. A retainer of Fahad's, Burjas al Dhafiri, was detailed to accompany us on our journey, to save us from molestation by the Amarat. He could not, of course, protect us from raiders from other tribes. Burjas came from the Dhafir tribe, not the Amarat. He had been obliged to flee from his relatives owing to a blood feud, and had taken refuge with Ibn Hadhdhal, whose trusted retainer he had become. Burjas was so short-sighted that he was almost blind, but he knew the desert perfectly for hundreds of miles. As we rode along, he would cross-question us as to what we could see. "To the north-west, there should soon appear two low round hills each surmounted by a heap of stones, like a woman's breasts." "Can you see on the south a tall grey peak? It is Feridat al Wa'ar."

Burjas, half-blind, carried 200,000 square miles of desert in his mind's eye, and could estimate when every distant landmark would come into view.

We made for the water-holes at Al Molussi, in the hope of hearing news of Ibn Shaalan. The water-holes were in a narrow valley at the foot of a rocky cliff. There was nobody camped on the water. We stopped to drink, when suddenly we were startled by a voice calling: "What are you, O camel riders?"

High above us on the rocky cliff face sat three men, each holding a rifle. Burjas argued with them without revealing our identity,

for we were at their mercy had they proved to be hostile. They eventually identified themselves as Sba'a, a tribe friendly to the Amarat. They told us that they were picketing the well to watch for a raiding party led by Sultan al Tayyar—Sultan the Flier—of which they had received warning. They advised us to be on the look-out.

It was about ten o'clock one morning when we topped a low desert ridge and came in sight of a wide grassy hollow thickly covered with black bedouin tents, in the middle of which the huge tent of the shaikh was plainly visible. It was not without trepidation that we tapped our camels into their briskest walk, and closed in on one another, flank touching flank and neck to neck, so as to make a dignified entry. Perhaps because every man in the desert went with his life in his hands, and anyone he met might be an enemy, the bedouins were always careful to make a dignified and reserved arrival at a strange camp. We dismounted, hobbled our camels and, wrapping our cloaks around us, advanced at a stately walk side by side. A negro slave who was making coffee unrolled a rug for us to sit on. A few men sitting in the tent returned our salutation, and we sat down in silence.

Perhaps ten minutes elapsed before Al Nuri himself entered, a fierce, glowering face, with a hawk-like nose and bright, piercing eyes. He sat down without a word of welcome and another long silence ensued. At a scarcely perceptible gesture from the old man, his clerk rolled a cigarette and placed it between his fingers. A slave stepped forward quickly with a glowing ember in a tongs to light it. The shaikh puffed in silence and glowered round. Burjas rose and crossed the tent, and laid our letter of introduction before him. "Fahad sends you his greetings," he said. But the chief only grunted, and the letter remained lying in front of him on the ground. Another ten minutes of silence ensued. Then the shaikh beckoned his clerk to read the letter to him, for he could neither read nor write. Now at last, I thought, his churlish manners will change, for I knew what was in the letter.

The secretary read in a low voice in the shaikh's ear. When it was finished, the latter gave a grunt and relapsed once more into silence and cigarette smoke. The tension was increasing and I began to grow angry. The remainder of our journey was across



Ramadi Bridge, 1921

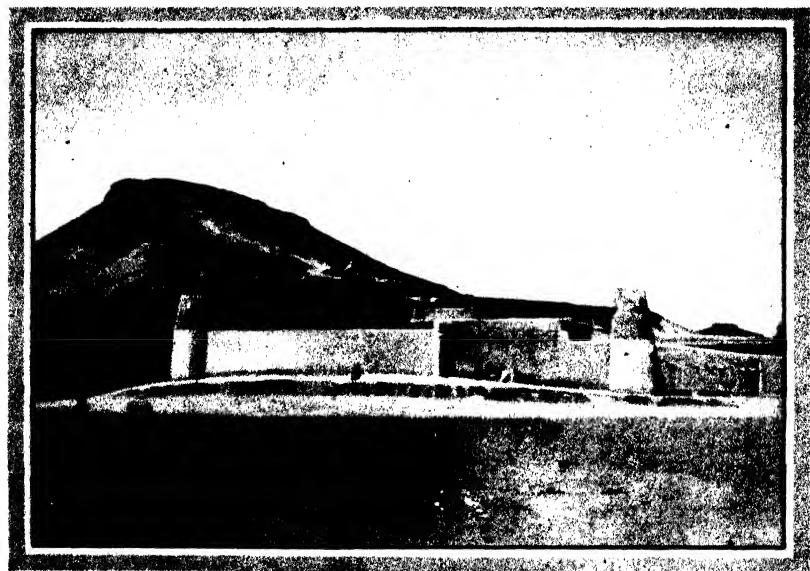


On the left, the foreman of my gang Mohammed  
al Koodi

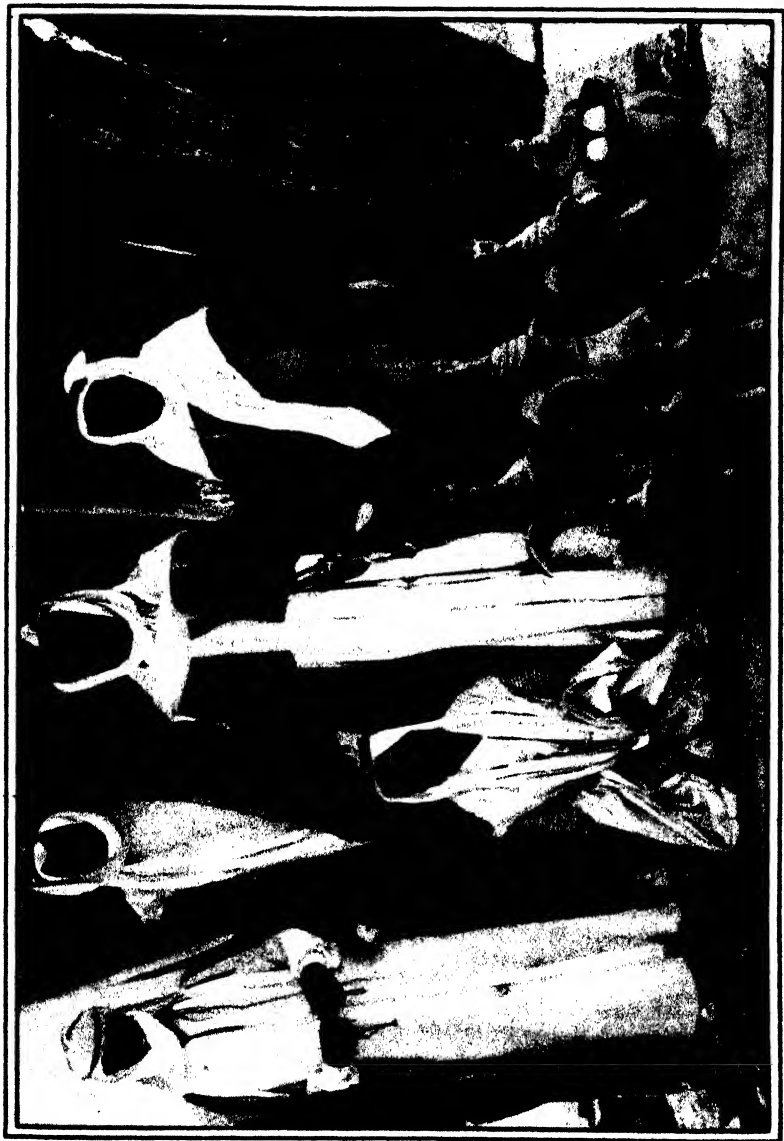




We halted for food at midday. On the left, Qasim  
ash Sheman; on the right, my servant Ali



The little stone fort of Kaf



A Bedouin shaikh's set of coffee pots



A sergeant in the Desert Patrol  
(from the painting by W. A. Stewart)

desert country, full of tribes which recognized the authority of no government. Without the assistance of this old man, it might be impossible to proceed. Even so, I felt that I could with dignity wait no longer, and I signalled to my two companions. We rose, walked out of the tent to our camels, and began to adjust the saddles and prepare to mount. But a slave ran out to us and, pulling Ibn Hadhdhal's man by the sleeve, he led him back to the tent. Apparently he persuaded the shaikh that we were harmless, for we were invited back, and Al Nuri himself so far unbent as to say, "You are welcome! We are always glad to see the English!" This appeared to use up his available conversation, and he soon afterwards disappeared. We spent the rest of the day strolling about, talking to the slaves and tribesmen, or sitting amongst bales of cloth and tobacco in the tiny tent of an itinerant merchant from the Iraq desert oasis of Kubaisa.

Al Nuri was a tremendous personality who maintained despotic control over his tribe. His authority was notorious, and the Ruwallah were frequently laughed at by other tribes for their tame submission to such autocracy. One such story related how a man of the tribe, summoned in the tomb by the recording angels to give an account of his actions on earth, replied, "I am only a dead Ruweili, and all claims are settled by Ibn Shaalan." But although a redoubtable champion in action (he had murdered his elder brother in order to make himself shaikh of the tribe), he did not, like most Arabs, possess the gift of conversation.

The authority which Ibn Shaalan wielded over the Ruwallah was probably unique amongst bedouins, and was due to personal fear of this formidable old man. The Arab tribesman will accord theoretical and verbal respect to the old families of chiefs, but he will rarely accord them obedience in practice. He constantly opposes and argues against his shaikh. Not infrequently he loses his temper, creates a violent scene and hastens to strike his tent and move away to join the following of some other chief who will treat him with more consideration. Amongst bedouins freedom always tended to degenerate into anarchy—but free they were—freer perhaps than any other race in the world.

In happy England we have come, for centuries past, to identify our personal liberties with the political independence of our

country. Few people in Britain have realized to what an extent personal and national freedom may be divorced, a point so clearly brought out by Gibbon at the head of this chapter. In Turkish days, the Arabs had no political existence, but as individuals they were as free as any men in the world. Their freedom admittedly owed nothing to Turkish generosity. It was due solely to the inability of the Government to control them.

We slept but one night in the camp of Ibn Shaalan. Next morning we set out once more, having bidden farewell to Burjas, and accompanied by one Qasim ash Shemam, a swarthy villain, detailed to accompany us by Al Nuri. We had scarcely ridden for an hour when we were stopped by two camel riders who overtook us, waving their cloaks to show that they were not hostile, an advisable precaution in those days when the custom of the desert was often to shoot first and ask questions afterwards. They proved to be the nephews of the shaikh, Khalid and Trad ibn Shaalan. In contrast to Al Nuri, they greeted us only with smiles and expressions of welcome, and begged us to spend the rest of the day with them. We protested in vain that we had ridden for only an hour. Half laughing and persuading, half compelling, they turned the heads of our camels, and we soon came upon the big black tent concealed in a small valley in the bare, rocky hills.

There could be no doubt of the warmth of our welcome here. Not only were we obliged to eat and drink almost continuously all day, but Trad pronounced himself dissatisfied with our outfit. It is true that the weather was cold, and the Syrian desert can be bitter when a north wind howls over these barren steppes. First I was obliged to accept some warm gloves, then a magnificent pair of black French boots with pointed toes and buttoning half-way up the calf. I was doubtful for which sex they were originally intended. Sugar, tea, meat, bread and other additions were made to our provisions. It was with difficulty that I resisted the offer of a smart suit of clothes and a better riding camel.

An officer or administrator can rarely obtain a true impression of the people in the district in which he works. To do so, few methods can be better than to travel through the country unknown and poorly dressed, with one or two companions. I was quite unknown to Khalid and Trad, and they were themselves powerful

and wealthy shaikhs, who had nothing to seek from me. Many years later, I was able to acknowledge their kindness and do a very little to help them.

Next morning we left the tent of Khalid and Trad, and set out across the desert for the west. Before noon we came across a tribe on the move, the vast flocks of camels walking and grazing slowly, the caravan of loaded camels, the shaikhs' women in gaily decorated litters ornamented with red tassels and rows of white shells, the men and boys walking or riding, and the flocks of sheep. Half a mile ahead rode the chief with the advanced guard—three camelmen and two horsemen, one with a hawk on his wrist and a greyhound trotting beside his mare. Our guide, Qasim ash Shemam, must needs trot over to them to gossip. I rode parallel to the group twenty or thirty yards away. Suddenly they all looked my way, and a stentorian voice called out, "God damn the English and Ibn Shaalan who shelters them!" The infidel and the stranger were not always welcome, it seemed. It was Fayyadh ibn Jendal, a tribesman of the old school. Ten years later I was to be a close friend of his son and nephew. But the fortune of the day brought us in the evening to Melih al Ga'ga, of a family who had been themselves chiefs of the Ruwallah before the rise of the Shaalan. Here we once more met with the same cordial welcome as from Khalid and Trad. An argument arose between our host and his young son in front of the tent. We could hear an exchange of angry words between them. Qasim later informed us that the boy demanded that his father slaughter a camel for our dinner, whereas the old man said that a whole sheep would suffice. Such are the extravagancies of Arab hospitality, amongst people who themselves live perilously near to the starvation level.

The ensuing days were less eventful. A bitter north-west wind howled in our faces. Sand and dust filled the air so thickly that we could see only a few hundred yards. At night we failed to find any tribal camps, and shivered cheerless in the open, beneath the gusts of stinging sand. It was not safe to light a fire for fear of raiding parties.

The camel is capable of covering great distances in twenty-four hours, but the idea that the "swift dromedary" skims across the

desert like a bird is a European illusion. The bedouin, it is true, will make his camel gallop in a battle. Good riding camels will travel at a jog-trot for considerable distances. But a journey of several hundred miles is chiefly performed at a walk. The camel covers long distances owing to its powers of endurance and the hardihood of its rider. Twenty hours' riding a day at five miles an hour makes a hundred miles, and four hours' rest will often suffice the bedouins.

These long hours of slow movement are sometimes an intense weariness. The country traversed is often featureless or only slightly undulating plains. The saddle, a wooden framework with a goat-skin and saddle-bag thrown over it, soon rubs sores on the thighs of the beginner.

The worst enemy of the inexperienced camel rider is the heat and glare, especially near Iraq or on the shores of the Red Sea, for the uplands of the hinterland are cooler. On our crossing of the Syrian desert, however, we suffered not from the heat but from the cold. Not a tree or a cliff was to be found to break the violence of that cutting north wind, which seemed to howl around us day and night. It blew round our legs as we sat shivering on our camels, it bore away our voices so that we could not hear one another speak. It filled our stale bread and sticky dates with sand when we dismounted to eat.

Occasionally this dumb and hopeless misery was forgotten in a wild alarm, a glimpse of raiders, a swift flight down little valleys. Once topping a small ridge, we came in sight of a group of camelmén riding towards us at a range of only a few hundred yards. Qasim, who had the raider's eye for country, raced down into a little hollow on our right. Keeping in low ground, we hit our camels sharply and dashed on at top speed. Suddenly our leader pulled up, jumped off, hobbled his camel and ran forward up a low ridge. We followed his example as best we could, and flung ourselves on the ground a few yards from him, loading as we did so. The other party had not seen us, and by raising my head slightly I could see them riding along, unconcernedly talking together. They were within close range now. The gear on their saddles and the fact that they were driving a camel laden with sacks proved that they were not raiders. Qasim suddenly stood up

and shouted, though with his rifle still at the ready, "Wesh entum? (What are you?)" The strangers were thrown into some confusion, but one of them slipped from his camel and advanced on Qasim, also with his rifle ready. Both men had their kerchiefs tied over their faces, so that only their eyes were visible. They advanced towards one another intently and cautiously, like fighting cocks waiting for an opening. "Wa ent wesh ent?" replied the other. ("And you, who are you?") The rest of the other party had couched their camels out of sight in another hollow. They did not look like raiders, but I could not but hold my breath as the two advanced towards one another. Then suddenly the tension relaxed. "Dhana Muslim, sons of Muslim," said the other man—it was the name of the division of Aneizah of which the Ruwallah formed part. Qasim lowered his rifle.

"Are you Ubaid?"

"You're Qasim."

"Keif ent? (How are you?)"

"God bless you."

"May you be well!"

"How are the boys?"

The two ragged, bearded ruffians slowly kissed one another, first on one cheek and then on the other.

"How are you?"

"God keep you."

"May God bless that face."

We stood up. The members of the other party advanced, reassured, dragging their camels by their head-ropes. Such were the daily incidents of desert life. Ten years later the Iraq Petroleum Company's pipeline passed this way, a pumping station had been built in this waste, and English ladies were taking their tea out for a picnic in these stony valleys. That ten years was to see the passing of an era.

Meanwhile Qasim ash Shemam was becoming increasingly domineering and threatening. He regarded us with ill-concealed contempt, as might an old deep-sea fisherman a couple of landlubbers who had never been to sea before. He repeatedly informed us that he was courting a girl, whom he shortly hoped to



marry, but that he required two camels as a present for her father to win his consent. The two camels which I and my servant were riding would be perfectly suitable, he hinted. When we halted for food at midday or in the evening, he would sit down, leaning his elbow on his saddle-bags beside him on the ground, and give his orders. "Hobble that camel, unload that gear." For with all their frank and open manners and their honourable customs, bedouins can be haughty and overbearing when they feel they have the whip-hand. Qasim was a man of limited intelligence, and a venal blackguard.

All the same, he had a sense of humour. Twenty years later, when I was commanding the Arab Legion, Qasim was arrested by the police, doubtless for some heinous crime. "You don't know who I am!" he said when the police came to take him away. "I'm the man who employed Glubb Pasha as a herdsman for my camel!"

Altogether it was with satisfaction that one morning we emerged from a narrow valley in the sandy and rocky hills and saw before us the dark green of the palm gardens, the little stone fort and the cluster of houses of the oasis of Kaf. The little fort was owned by Ibn Shaalan and garrisoned by his retainers, under the command of Salih ibn Uthman, a native of the oasis of Jauf. He greeted us with a kindness and consideration which was a pleasant contrast to the company of Qasim ash Shemam. The latter wished to return next day to his tribe, so I paid him off in the evening. But he shouted that the money was not enough and that he would seize our camels. Salih ibn Uthman intervened, and Qasim was persuaded to leave the room. Outside I could hear a loud altercation and a scuffle. Qasim disappeared during the night, taking with him a selection from our gear—my saddle and water-skin and Trad ibn Shaalan's warm gloves.

There was an Arab Legion post at Kaf, outside the village in a fortified camp on top of a steep hill. I paid them a visit and had tea with the officers. The evening was spent with Ibn Shaalan's retainers, sitting on the floor round the open hearth in the castle hall. On the glowing embers were ranged a row of coffee-pots. Outside howled that wind which had seemed to us so dreary as it whistled the stinging sand into our faces in the open desert.

After the first shyness had disappeared, conversation became free and general. The growing danger from the Ikhwan was anxiously debated—a raiding party had recently been seen at the well of Garagir, only a few miles south of Kaf. It was at this same well that Khalid ibn al Waleed had watered 1,300 years before, during the first Muslim invasion of Syria. Then, to forget the fears and anxieties of the day-to-day world, the one-stringed violin was brought out, and with a fresh round of tea began the poetry and music. In Central Arabia there is a story to every poem, and before reciting the ballad itself, the story should be told. One of the best stories told that night was the tale of Ibn Hadi's daughter.

Two of the most powerful tribes of Central Arabia are Ateiba and Qahtan, whose shaikhs, Ibn Humaid and Ibn Hadi, used in the old days to be perpetually at war. Once upon a time the then Ibn Hadi had a beautiful daughter, who resolutely refused to marry any of the numerous suitors who presented themselves for her hand. Ibn Humaid, head of the rival tribe, was a young man and a famous raider, and had carried plunder and devastation through the camps and flocks of Qahtan. His prowess was the talk of every camp and fireside in Nejd. In Ibn Hadi's tent many long and anxious debates were held to discuss how to resist the daring assaults of Ibn Humaid and Ateiba, and the Qahtan shaikhs swore to sacrifice a camel each as a thank-offering if their relentless enemy should ever fall into their hands. One day, yet another suitor presented himself at the tent of Ibn Hadi to solicit the hand of his daughter, and her father came to consult her. But she rejected the proposal contemptuously, and swore that she would never marry at all, unless her suitor were a bedouin shaikh, who was at the same time the most gallant in war, the most generous, the most handsome and the most witty of the Arabs. The suitor retired discomfited.

But a Sulubbi, a tinker of Arabia, a member of that menial tribe the members of which pass from camp to camp unmolested even in war-time, had overheard the conversation. "Ya amaimati! (My little Aunt)," he whined, "there is only one man who answers the description you have given, and that is Ibn Humaid." "Oh, if only I could once see him," said the daughter of Ibn Hadi.

The tinker wandered off, and days and weeks passed, until one day he came to a camp of the tribe of Ateiba and told the story, which was repeated by the tribesmen to Ibn Humaid. That night the shaikh slipped away from the camp unnoticed, and riding alone for several days across the desert, came in sight of the grazing flocks and the distant black tents of Qahtan. He lay concealed till the evening, and, after dark, slipped into the camp with his drawn sword in his hand. Reaching the shaikh's great tent, he crawled to where the daughter of Ibn Hadi was sleeping alone in a curtained compartment. Waking her quietly, he announced who he was, and they remained talking in whispers until the dawn appeared. Then the girl implored him to go, saying that he was courting death: but he refused. Soon the appearance of broad daylight made escape impossible.

In bedouin camps the chief makes coffee early in the morning, and the men of the tribe collect in his tent to drink it and discuss the topics of the day. Only a curtain, hung across the centre of the tent, divides them from the women. Soon the tribesmen began to collect in Ibn Hadi's tent, until all the leaders were present, talking and drinking coffee, and divided only by a curtain from their bitterest blood enemy, Ibn Humaid.

Then the girl nerved herself for the supreme crisis. Carefully steadying her voice, she stood up and, looking over the curtain dividing the tent, said: "O Father, I ask you to grant me a request." "It is granted before you ask it," said the shaikh, with whom she was a favourite child. Turning to the assembled chiefs of the tribe, she said: "O Qahtan! You are witnesses of my father's promise." Then addressing her father again, she asked him to spare the life of Ibn Humaid. The old man replied that such a request was ridiculous and told her not to be foolish. This was not women's work, and, in any case, Ibn Humaid was two hundred miles away in the tents of the biggest tribe in Arabia. When they had caught him, they could decide what to do with his life. "He is this moment in your tent," said she. The shaikh jumped to his feet, snatched his sword and glared round at his companions. Everybody was on his feet, crying out at once. But the fearless girl was not a raider's daughter for nothing. "O Qahtan!" she cried, "you are witnesses to my father's oath!"

The old men intervened and said that it was true. They were witnesses that her request had been granted whatever it might be. Ibn Humaid was received as an honoured guest, and the men of Qahtan who had sworn to sacrifice their camels if Ibn Humaid fell into their hands slaughtered them for the marriage feast.

The narrator's voice was silent. The hall was in darkness except for the glow of the embers on the hearth. It was past midnight. We rolled ourselves in our sheepskin cloaks, the shaikh's retainers produced pillows and quilts, and in a few minutes we were asleep.

Only when we were saddling up next morning did we discover that Qasim ash Shemam had made off in the night with my saddle. Our hosts professed themselves deeply ashamed and indignant at this treachery, and the invaluable Salih ibn Uthman produced another saddle, on which I rode in some discomfort for the rest of the journey. There remained only 120 miles to Amman. We left the Ruwallah country at Kaf, and, saying farewell to our kind friends, set out for the country of the Beni Sakhr tribe of Trans-Jordan.

The wind had dropped, the sky was cloudless, the air soft and warm, and range upon range of blue desert hills stretched before and behind us. Three hours' riding brought us to the tent of a shaikh of the Beni Sakhr. Our reception was non-committal, the shaikh, it appeared, being away. We had not been seated long before an old car rattled up, and two Arabs descended from it and entered the tent. Everybody rose, and hastily spread carpets and cushions and welcomed the visitors, who were obviously people of importance. By way of making conversation, I enquired what news there was. One of the visitors replied that as an Englishman I obviously knew more of world events than they. I answered that this was not so in my case at least, for I had spent a month on a camel in the desert, whereas he had just arrived by car from Amman. "Oh, in that case," replied the shaikh, "I will tell you. We hear that the English have broken their promises again, as usual."

Such was my first reception by the tribes of Trans-Jordan, with whom I was later on to become so intimate.

I decided, in spite of my reception, to stay for the night in the Beni Sakhr tents, both in the hope that more intimate acquaintance would overcome this inauspicious beginning and also to learn more about the Beni Sakhr, a tribe which I had never met before. The shaikh in the car drove off after lunch, and by the time we had had dinner and were sitting in a circle round the fire, the atmosphere had become more cordial.

Sitting over the coffee-pots, I noticed a long, slim, dark-complexioned youth, with those fine features which distinguish a certain type of Nejdi nomad, and which were in contrast to the fairer complexions and thicker build of the Beni Sakhr. When an opportunity offered, I enquired about his origin, and was told that he came of the tribe of Mutair. My work in southern Iraq had brought me into contact with this tribe, though usually as enemy raiders, and I knew the names of their leaders and the geography of their country. The boy's face glowed with pleasure when he heard once more the names of his tribesmen and the news of their latest raiding exploits. He then told me his story.

He had joined a large raiding party which had attacked Trans-Jordan the year before, and which included several war banners of Mutair. A Beni Sakhr camp had been surprised and overwhelmed at dawn, and many killed. During the battle, he was hit by a bullet and fell unconscious from the back of his camel. When he recovered consciousness, he felt very cold. He looked around him. It appeared to be shortly after dawn, but the sun had not risen yet. He was stark naked and lying on the ground, with corpses and dead animals strewn around. A short way from where he lay were some black bedouin tents, from which a few wisps of smoke showed that the occupants were already awake. Shivering with cold, dazed and weak, he staggered towards the nearest tent. A man was kneeling in the tent with his back to him, blowing up the embers of a fire.

When the wounded boy was some ten paces from the tent, the man looked round. With a savage cry he sprang to his feet, snatched a rifle and ran towards him. But in his excitement he fumbled with the bolt and safety-catch. The naked Mutairi staggered past him and embraced the tent pole. "I am under the protection of this house," he cried. The Sakhri threw his rifle

down in disgust. "God curse thee, traitress," he growled. He disappeared behind the curtain into the woman's half of the tent, and returned carrying a shirt and cloak, and dragging a carpet, which he spread. He gave the clothes to the wounded boy, with the words "Welcome to the guest," and quietly proceeded to blow up the embers of the fire again. "Since which," added the Mutairi with a sad smile, "I have lived with these worthies, who have allowed me to lack nothing. But you have brought me happiness with news of my people." He rose with the coffee-pot and cups in his hand to pour out another round of coffee.

Whatever the Beni Sakhr thought of British diplomacy, they had obviously not forgotten the old chivalry of Arabia.

We reached Amman in the morning, and entered a narrow street through a crowded bazaar. We were on four camels, myself and my servant, a man of the Ruwallah sent with us from Kaf and a Sherari of the despised tribe of that name. Our camels were shy and nervous in the bustle of the bazaars, after the wide spaces of the silent desert. Suddenly a rattling Ford car confronted us in the narrow street. With that lack of feeling for animals which could be shown only by city dwellers, the driver began to blow his horn as loudly as he could under the very noses of our camels. My camel shied and knocked over a tray of tomatoes projecting from a greengrocer's shop. The shopman shouted, the driver blew his horn still louder, and a policeman arrived and added his voice to the pandemonium. The policeman also had a stick, with which he proceeded to rain blows on to our camels, roaring: "God curse the father of all bedouins!" Another policeman arrived blowing a whistle, the shop people joined in the hue and cry, and we were soon all four racing out of Amman, cloaks flying, rifles bumping painfully on our backs and followed by the mingled imprecations of the police force and the civil population. Such was my first introduction to the Arab Legion police.

By a coincidence, I arrived in Trans-Jordan when His Majesty King Husain, formerly the Sherif Husain, leader of the Arab revolt, was paying a visit to his son, the Amir Abdulla. The court was under canvas in the Jordan valley to avoid the cold of Amman, which is 2,600 feet above sea-level. I arrived at the royal

camp early in the morning, and was first shown into a small tent where the Amirs Ali and Abdulla, the eldest and the second sons of the King, were seated on carpets. They were discussing some question regarding the rehabilitation of the railway from Damascus to Medina, which had been destroyed in so many places during the late war.

After a short wait, I was summoned to the audience with the King. As I approached the tent, I met two American newspaper correspondents who were coming away from an interview. There seemed to be many tourists and pressmen round the camp. I was shown into a large white marquee tent, at one end of which on a dais the King himself was seated on a chair. I was given a seat below the dais on the King's right. I saw before me a frail, slight old man with a long white beard down to his chest, the perfect embodiment of the Old Testament patriarch. He began by asking where I had come from, in a tone which seemed to me polite but uninterested. He appeared a little weary of making small-talk to uncomprehending Europeans, who had come to see him from curiosity. I replied that I had come from Iraq. "By air or by car," enquired His Majesty politely. "I came riding a camel, my lord," I answered. "A camel?" The King was quickly on his feet, seized me by the hand and was pulling me round to the back of the tent behind his chair. A curtained doorway led down a corridor with canvas sides and roof to another tent. The King, slender, frail and stooping, was almost running, pulling me behind him. We entered another tent which appeared to be the King's bedroom. In the centre of it stood a bed. A few other simple articles of furniture stood against the walls. Still in silence, his long white beard flowing, he led me round the foot of the bed. "There," he pointed triumphantly, "I never go anywhere without it!" On the ground beside his bed was a camel saddle, a sheep-skin rug and a riding cane.

What did such a patriarch with his Biblical dignity and his camel saddle make of the American press reporters? It was a meeting of two worlds.

We returned to the reception tent. "Wellahi, hadha beduwi. (By my God, this one is a bedouin)," said the King, pointing to me, as a tall negro slave with a silver sword poured out the coffee.

# III

## *The Beginning of Trans-Jordan*

"Without were fightings, within were fears."

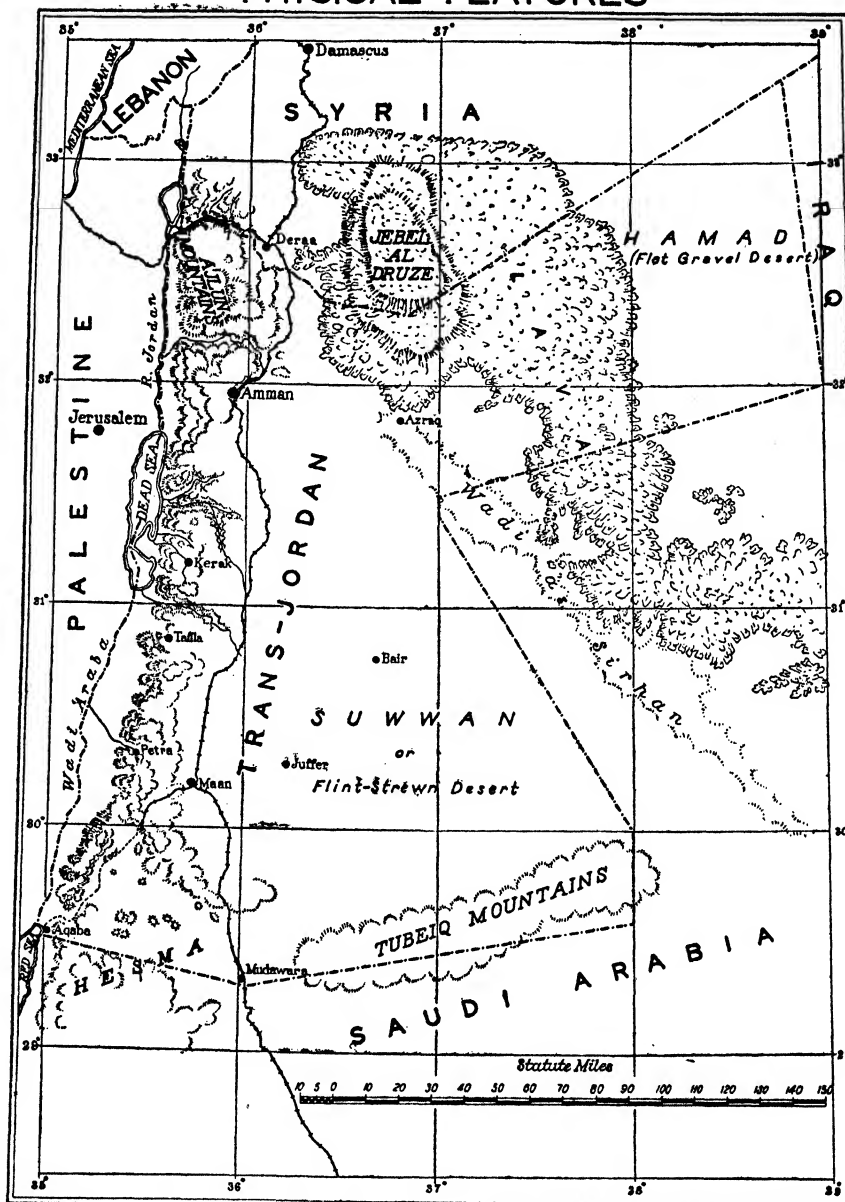
2 CORINTHIANS vii. 5.

"Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof."

ECCLESIASTES vii. 8.



# TRANS-JORDAN PHYSICAL FEATURES



Drawn by Farid Agay, Amman, Trans-Jordan.

## THE BEGINNING OF TRANS-JORDAN

THE eastern end of the Mediterranean from Anatolia to Sinai is closed by two parallel ranges of mountains. The western range forms in the north the snow-capped chain of the Lebanon, its foot bathed in the blue waters of the Mediterranean. On the south this range peters out in the hills of Palestine until it disappears at Beersheba. The eastern and western ranges are divided by one of the longest and deepest clefts in the world. Beginning in Northern Syria, where it divides the Lebanon and anti-Lebanon ranges, it is continued by the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea, the Wadi Araba and the Red Sea itself, re-emerging in Africa in the Great Lakes. The eastern range is in the north called anti-Lebanon. In the south it forms the hills of Trans-Jordan. The boundary between Palestine and Trans-Jordan is the Jordan River as far south as the Dead Sea, and the centre of the Wadi Araba from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba. Thus the traveller from Palestine to Trans-Jordan begins at the bottom of the great cleft, facing a 4,000-foot wall of mountains. These mountains are covered with villages, vineyards, cultivation and, in the north, with forests. But on the east the mountains shelve away almost imperceptibly into the desert, which stretches in 400 miles of undulating steppes to the Euphrates. Cultivation extends for a distance of from twenty to twenty-five miles east of the crest of the range. Becoming gradually poorer and thinner, it finally gives way to scrub-covered desert. Running north and south parallel to the crest of the hills some twenty miles east of it lies the Hejaz Railway, which thus forms an approximate boundary between the desert and the sown.

The Turks for many centuries virtually limited their control to the Mediterranean seaboard and the garrisoning of Damascus, Medina and Mecca. No attempt was made to govern or administer the country now known as Trans-Jordan. Only the annual

pilgrimage caravan travelled laboriously down what is now the line of the railway, threatened or actually attacked by the bedouin tribes, whom the Turkish authorities bought off with subsidies but could never bring under control. At the end of each day's march, a high-walled stone fort guarded a rain-water catchment cistern, where the caravan could drink and spend the night.

The Ajlun area, the most northerly district of Trans-Jordan, enjoyed, or perhaps rather endured, a certain amount of Turkish control from the second half of the nineteenth century, but no attempt was made to occupy the district round Amman until the 1880's. The construction of the Hejaz Railway compelled the Government to extend their influence farther southwards, and a governor was first appointed to Kerak in 1892. The Mujali, the principal tribal shaikhs of the area, revolted, but their revolt was suppressed with extreme severity, the rebel leaders being done to death by being thrown from the battlements of the Crusader castle into the valley below. The railway was opened to traffic to Medina in 1908, but the Turks still made no attempt to put an end to tribal warfare, especially amongst the bedouins. This was how matters stood when Turkey went to war in 1915.

Then in 1916 the Arab tribes were startled by the Sherifian revolt. In 1917 the Amir Feisal with the northern Arab Army arrived in Aqaba. For two years the country that was later to be Trans-Jordan was fought and raided over by Sherifians and Turks, and north of the Dead Sea by the British Army also.

Before raising the standard of revolt against the Turks in Mecca, the Sherif Husain had concluded a treaty with Great Britain. In return for an Arab rising against the Turks, Great Britain agreed to assist in the establishment of Arab Governments in northern Arabia. Whether or not Palestine or Lebanon were excluded from this pledge has since been argued at length. There can be no doubt whatever that Syria and Trans-Jordan were included. Unfortunately the British Government had meanwhile also signed a secret document with France, called the Sykes-Picot Agreement. This pact accorded to France a privileged position in Syria.

The two treaties appeared on the surface to be mutually incompatible. It has, however, been argued that the Sykes-Picot

Agreement did not rule out the possibility of an Arab Government in Syria. Such a new government would undoubtedly need the help and support of a Great Power at the outset. In Syria such assistance would be provided by France, in other areas by Britain. To implement this interpretation, the British Government established their ally, the Amir Feisal, as ruler of Syria. British troops were then withdrawn.

Meanwhile, after the end of the war in Europe, the French Army landed in the Lebanon and took over control of that country. This was in accordance with the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and was not in conflict with the promises to the Arabs, for the Lebanon had been excluded from the pledge.

The French in the Lebanon, however, soon quarrelled with their neighbours, the Arab Government of Syria. The French Army invaded Syria, captured Damascus and drove Feisal from the throne.

The Feisal Government in Damascus exercised a precarious control over Trans-Jordan for sixteen months. The French capture of Damascus left Trans-Jordan with no Government at all, a condition with which the inhabitants, in view of their past history, were perfectly familiar. Moreover, vague echoes of Allied promises of independence and self-determination encouraged amongst the tribes the idea that in the new era everybody would do just as he liked. The various tribal groups and country towns broke off from one another and commenced with considerable zest the process of doing exactly as they felt inclined. Three or four British officers remained more or less stranded in various districts.

Meanwhile the Sherif Husain had proclaimed himself King of the Hejaz. No very marked frontier had been laid down between the Kingdom of the Hejaz and the territory of the Arab Government of Damascus. King Husain, as the patriarch of the family, continued to regard himself as supreme sovereign of all territories ruled by his sons. The southern frontier of Syria now occupied by France was in future that agreed upon during the war in the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement, but no frontier existed between the loose-end territory of Trans-Jordan and the Hejaz Kingdom.

Generally speaking, however, Ma'an was controlled by King Husain, while Trans-Jordan controlled Kerak.

In 1921 the Amir Abdulla, second son of King Husain and late General of the Arab Army operations in the Hejaz during the war, arrived in Ma'an with a tribal force. More fiery than his brother Feisal, Abdulla was set upon the eviction of the French from Syria, a country undoubtedly promised an Arab Government in the agreement between Britain and the Sherifs. At the same time, a British Middle East Conference was assembling at Cairo, under the presidency of Mr. Winston Churchill. The prospect of a war between Britain's two allies—the French and the Arabs—was alarming, especially as these complications manifestly owed their origin to the confused and contradictory promises given by the British Government during the war.

Meanwhile, however, the wild and unwanted territory east of the Jordan was out of hand and without a government. Negotiations were opened, and the Amir Abdulla was persuaded to accept the sovereignty of the unwanted territory. Trans-Jordan was born.

The task facing His Highness was by no means a simple one. Trans-Jordan was four-fifths desert, inhabited by nomadic bedouins who had not been subjected to any government for many centuries, if, indeed, they had been so subjected even by the first Muslim Empire in the eighth and ninth centuries. In the cultivated area society was almost entirely tribally organized, under paramount shaikhs rarely powerful enough to maintain order but always able and often willing to destroy it. In the extreme north the villagers had been accustomed for a generation or more to the inefficient control of the Ottoman Government. Throughout the remainder of the country the Turks had been in occupation for only a few years, and almost the whole population recollected perfectly the great days before the Turks came.

The task was, therefore, to create rather than to take over the Government. For this purpose, His Highness had no money and no troops except the tribal forces with him in Ma'an, who were more fitted to destroy the Government of Syria (the task for which they had assembled) than to establish that of Trans-Jordan.

The overthrow of the Arab Government of Damascus, however, had released a number of Arab officials, officers and soldiers who had fought in the Arab Army during the war or had served in Feisal's short-lived civil administration in Damascus. They found themselves without occupation and almost without a country. The inauguration of an Arab Government in Trans-Jordan under another Sherifian prince provided many of them with a fresh opportunity of service and the Amir Abdulla with the staff for his administration.

One of the first problems to be faced was obviously the organization of armed forces to commence the task of establishing public security and bringing the independent tribes to order. A small police force was organized, but was scarcely adequate to maintain order in the streets of Amman, the new capital, and the three provincial towns of Irbid, Salt and Kerak. Meanwhile, a certain Captain F. G. Peake, who had commanded the Egyptian Camel Corps which had co-operated in the war with Feisal and Lawrence, was sent up from Egypt to assist His Highness to form an army. The force he raised was deliberately called, not the Trans-Jordan, but the Arab Army, the title used in the late war by the Arab forces of the Amir Feisal, and carried by them so proudly from Aqaba to Aleppo. Such a title sounded perhaps too grandiloquent in English ears for so small a force, and Al Jeish al Arabi was toned down by them to the Arab Legion.

The Arab Legion began its life in October 1920 with a strength of 100 men. In 1921 the strength was increased to 1,000. It was organized as a self-contained miniature army, with two companies of infantry, two squadrons of cavalry, a troop of artillery and a signals section. Before long the maintenance of a civil police force of 300 and a military force of 1,000 men was found to be both expensive and inefficient, and the civil police were also placed under the command of Arab Legion Headquarters.

At first the people of Trans-Jordan regarded the new force with suspicion, not unmixed with hostility in the case of tribesmen. It too obviously threatened tribal independence with the reimposition of government control. The only Government the tribes had experienced was Turkish, and they had not liked it. Few if

any volunteers came forward for enlistment, and it was with difficulty that the force could be brought up to strength. At one time it was even found necessary to enlist a contingent of recruits from Palestine, but they proved so disloyal and undisciplined that they were speedily discharged.

Difficulties arose on every side in addition to recruiting. No buildings existed to accommodate the force, or its stores or animals, for the only transport available was horses. The Arab Legion did not possess a single mechanical vehicle. The finances of the new-born Government were chaotic, and little revenue could be collected until the armed forces could establish order. But the armed forces could not establish order until they were trained and equipped, a process requiring money, which had to be sought in the form of a subsidy from Great Britain. For one month, Peake paid the Arab Legion in instalments from his own pocket. When his banking account was exhausted, he sent a personal cable to Lord Trenchard at the Air Ministry, a step which produced the cash, though it earned Peake a rebuke for not corresponding through the usual channels.

No sooner did it seem that the first difficulties of pay, recruitment and administration were on the way to be overcome than tribal rebellion broke out against the extending authority of the Government. Kulaib ash Shuraidi, the principal shaikh in the mountains of Ajlun, was the first to move. A small column of the Arab Legion, moving up a valley in the mountains (instead of along a spur), was ambushed and suffered heavy casualties. Peake himself took charge of the punitive column. By a feint, he persuaded the tribesmen to leave their villages and take up a defensive position across a track along which the Arab Legion column was expected to advance. Then by a rapid outflanking march, the column approached the insurgent villages from the opposite direction and found them unguarded. The tribesmen when it was too late found their position turned, and surrendered after a skirmish.

The next to rebel was Sultan ibn Adwan, the shaikh of the Belqa district, who marched upon the capital. But meanwhile the R.A.F. were constructing a small camp and aerodrome near Amman, and it was their armoured cars which went out to

encounter the advancing tribal force. In a brief engagement, the tribesmen were repulsed and the rebellion collapsed.

A more troublesome incident took place in 1925. In a narrow mountain valley north-west of Ma'an, a clear stream of water springs from an overhanging rock. A little brook flows down to a point where the valley widens between the arid overhanging mountains, and terraced gardens of vine and fig and a small mud village are watered by the stream. According to Arab tradition, this is the place where Moses struck the rock and caused the water to flow for the benefit of the Israelites, the very brook which we still see today. The valley is called by the Arabs Wadi Musa, or the Valley of Moses. The ruins of Petra lie only a couple of miles west of Wadi Musa, in a tangle of wild mountains and precipices which have from time immemorial formed a refuge from regular armies. Although Wadi Musa lay west of the Hejaz Railway, the Turks had made little attempt to penetrate this mountainous area, and the local tribesmen, the Liyathna, were unused to any government control.

A post of five men of the Arab Legion was established in a small house in the village. But it was attacked by the tribesmen, and the five soldiers were all killed. The Liyathna declared their intention of resisting all attempts to extend Government control to their area. To deal with this situation, nearly six hundred men of the Arab Legion were collected, the remainder of the country being temporarily denuded. It was a risk which had to be accepted, but which could not be prolonged without courting a collapse elsewhere. Peake himself took command of the operation. The Valley of Moses is surrounded on all sides by high, barren mountains, except for the narrow ravine through which enters the little sparkling brook. Peake employed his usual tactics. He undertook obvious preparations to cross the northern mountains. The tribesmen left their villages and lined the heights overlooking the northern pass, when Peake by a swift counter-march crossed the southern mountains and entered the valley unopposed.

But these internal revolts were not the only danger with which the new country and its tiny army were threatened. The deserts and oases of Central Arabia were once more in a ferment. The nomadic tribes of the Arabian Peninsula had formed the raw



material of the first Muslim armies of the seventh century. Since the first Muslim conquests, the Arabian cauldron had more than once boiled over, flooding the more fertile northern lands with wild raiders and warriors.

At the end of the first Great War, the process seemed about to be repeated. The Muslim religious revival known as the Wahhabi movement will be further described in the ensuing chapters. Suffice it to say that this religious outburst, which reached its height in the 1920's, had produced amongst the simple warrior tribes of Central Arabia that passionate enthusiasm and reckless courage so often shown throughout history by Muslim warriors intent on gaining Paradise by death in a holy war.

To these religious zealots, the Muslims of Trans-Jordan were lax and unorthodox. The Ikhwan, or brethren, as the Wahhabis called themselves, determined to convert the Trans-Jordanians by the sword to stricter religious principles. Threatened by revolts at home and with inadequate funds to maintain its little army, the infant Trans-Jordan Government found itself menaced by invasion from without.

Like the first Muslim armies of the seventh century, the Ikhwan travelled by forced marches in the desert, and descended unexpectedly and in overwhelming force on the settled villages whenever they felt so inclined.

The R.A.F. had recently established the first trans-desert Air Mail from Cairo to Baghdad, and a landing-ground had been prepared on the plain of Ziza, twenty miles south of Amman, where the aircraft could land and refill. One morning in the spring of 1924, an R.A.F. lorry left Amman with a load of oil and petrol for Ziza landing-ground. After passing the crest of the hills south of Amman, the lorry driver noticed a number of Arabs running past him. As he went on, the numbers of the fugitives increased, and there were more signs of panic and confusion. Some of them stopped the vehicle, made a sign of passing their fingers across their throats, pointed southwards and hastily resumed their flight. The driver hesitated, consulted his companion, decided that something was wrong and drove back to the Amman R.A.F. camp. An aircraft took off, and after a few minutes' flying saw large masses of camelmen, accompanied by

unfurled war banners, advancing across the Ziza plain towards Amman. The aircraft hastened back, and soon more aircraft and armoured cars were turning out.

The aircraft arrived first and dropped their bombs, without great practical effect on a force which was already scattered looting villages and encampments over the wide plain. But they caused the scattered Ikhwan to abandon their individual pursuits and return towards the main body. Then the armoured cars debouched on the plain. It was the first time the Ikhwan had encountered modern weapons efficiently handled. They did the worst thing they could have done—they rallied round their war banners. The compacter the mass of men, camels and horses, the easier the target for the spitting machine-guns. Soon men and animals were falling on one another in inextricable confusion. A few horsemen drew their swords to the cry of "Al Jenna! Ya Muslimin! (Paradise! O Muslims!)" and rode at the armoured cars.

The war banners wavered, contradictory cries broke out, the machine-guns rattled, and at last the great host broke, the banners fell and a stream of scattered camelmen raced for the hills and safety. The bravery of a world that was gone was broken by lead and steel. There was no pursuit. The plain was strewn with dead and dying men and animals. The R.A.F. were sick with killing. The Beni Sakhr, the tribe the villages and encampments of which had been sacked and looted during the attack, rallied partially in pursuit and cut off some stragglers. A detachment of Arab Legion cavalry followed the enemy's retreat and took prisoners. But, on the Arab side, the honours of the day rested with Dirdah ibn Bakhit, a shaikh of the Beni Sakhr. This man, a famous fighter not to say murderer, was surprised by the attack on his village. For hours he and a handful of his relations and retainers held off the enemy, until the arrival of the R.A.F. His exploit was celebrated by an Arab poet in a famous ballad beginning:

*"O Seif! Dirdah taught the Ikhwan manners!  
He schooled them as they school the oxen in Gara!"*

Although another eight years were to pass before hostilities

with the Ikhwan on the Trans-Jordan border were to cease, the battle of Ziza decided the issue that the Ikhwan were not to repeat the conquests of the first Muslims of the eighth century. All their fanaticism and all their courage were useless in the face of modern weapons.

Eventually, a treaty was signed between Trans-Jordan and Great Britain, in which Trans-Jordan was recognized as an "independent" state, except that its foreign relations would remain in the hands of the British Government. Moreover, Great Britain undertook all responsibility for the defence of Trans-Jordan against external aggression, and agreed to make up the annual deficit in the Trans-Jordan budget, in return for which she retained the right to examine Trans-Jordan finances.

This regularization of the position between Great Britain and Trans-Jordan, which had taken more than eight years after the termination of the war to achieve, was accompanied by a severe blow to the Arab Legion. The force was reduced by 600 men and its artillery and signals were disbanded. At the same time a new force called the Trans-Jordan Frontier Force was created. The Arab Legion was in future to be responsible for internal security alone, while the Trans-Jordan Frontier Force was to be charged with the defence of the frontiers, an obligation undertaken under the new treaty by His Majesty's Government. For this reason, the T.J.F.F. were British Imperial Troops under the command of the High Commissioner for Palestine. The Arab Legion, on the other hand, was the armed force of the Trans-Jordan Government, and its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Peake, was himself a servant of the Amir's Government.

These two forces, so often confused, were thus not only distinct but owed allegiance to different Governments. Even more, they represented very different systems.



On the southern frontier of the Trans-Jordan desert lie the mountains of Tubaig



The Huwaitat believed that in Tubaiq they had an inviolable refuge which government forces could never enter

# IV

## *The Land of Blood*

“In Arabia, I saw a nation at once pastoral and warlike; who live without any settled habitation; whose only wealth is their flocks and herds; and who have yet carried on through all ages an hereditary war with mankind, though they neither covet nor envy their possessions.”

DR. JOHNSON, *Rasselas*.

“As whirlwinds in the south pass through: So it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land.”

ISAIAH xxi. 1.



## IV

### THE LAND OF BLOOD

CENTRAL Arabia, known to the Arabs as Nejd, has rarely been governed for long. A considerable number of oases exist in the centre of the peninsula, but these groups of towns and villages are separated from the outside world by belts of desert steppes inhabited by nomad tribes. A fundamental rivalry exists between the nomads and the oasis dwellers. In the past the tribes have, more often than not, dominated the scene. Politics in Nejd have for centuries past followed a definite cycle. The tribes are at feud with one another, and constant wars and raids take place. Gradually some leader emerges, and subjects tribe after tribe to his suzerainty until his sway covers a greater or lesser portion of the peninsula. Some form of government appears, tribal raids are forbidden within the prince's dominions, and attempts are made to punish criminals. Then the ruler dies, his sons quarrel amongst themselves or the tribes rebel. The newly erected edifice crumbles. Uncontrolled tribal warfare returns, until some new war-lord emerges and the process is repeated.

At the middle of the eighteenth century, Nejd was thus in chaos. In or about 1744, a teacher called Muhamad ibn Abdul Wahhab commenced preaching a religious revival in Central Arabia. He took refuge with the shaikh of Deraï'ya, one of the small oases of Nejd. The name of this shaikh was Muhamad ibn Saud. The Arabs have always become formidable soldiers when a religious movement has reinforced their martial virtues. The alliance between Muhamad ibn Saud and the preacher Muhamad Abdul Wahhab provided such a situation. The members of the military sect which they founded called themselves Wahhabis, after the name of their teacher.

The thirty years from 1744 to 1774 were devoted to the subjection of the other tribes and oases of Nejd. A further thirty years



of expansion ensued, and in 1806 the Wahhabis captured Mecca and were threatening Damascus, Aleppo and Baghdad. The Arab expansion of the seventh century seemed to be about to be repeated.

The Turkish Empire was powerless to organize military expeditions sufficiently powerful to crush the Wahhabis. Meanwhile, however, an Albanian soldier, Muhamad Ali, had made himself ruler of Egypt. The Sublime Porte was too weak to remove Muhamad Ali, so it sought to use him. He was commissioned to drive the Wahhabis from the Holy Places of Mecca and Medina.

In 1811 Tusun, the son of Muhamad Ali Pasha, landed in the Hejaz with the Egyptian Army. Incidentally the pasha commanding his cavalry was a former private soldier of the British Army. He had deserted from General Abercrombie's army, which had landed in Egypt to fight the French. Tusun was able in 1812 to drive the Wahhabis from Mecca. Operations dragged on until 1817, when Ibrahim Pasha, another son of Muhamad Ali, assumed the command. This brilliant leader, who was soon to acquire an international reputation, made short work of the Wahhabi power. In September 1818 the ruling prince, Abdulla ibn Saud, surrendered to Ibrahim Pasha. Dera'i'ya, the Wahhabi capital, was destroyed.

In the middle of the nineteenth century the Wahhabi principality enjoyed a temporary revival, under the leadership of Feisal ibn Saud. On his death in 1867, two of his sons quarrelled and a civil war ensued. The shaikh of the Shammar tribe, Muhammad ibn Rasheed, finally overthrew the Sauds in 1885, and made himself ruler of all Nejd.

For thirty years the Saud family disappeared from the scene. The Rasheeds entirely dominated Central Arabia. At the end of the century, the death of the great Muhammad ibn Rasheed gave the Sauds new hope. A younger member of the Saud family was living in exile in Kuwait on the Persian Gulf. His name was Abdul Aziz ibn Saud. Meanwhile Abdul Aziz ibn Rasheed had succeeded Muhammad as the ruler of Nejd. The two Abdul Aziz's were to fight a duel for the sovereignty of Nejd for five years. In 1901 Abdul Aziz ibn Saud seized possession of the oasis of Riyadh

in southern Nejd by a quick *coup de main*. Central Arabia divided into two camps—the north with Ibn Rasheed, the south with Ibn Saud. In 1906 Abdul Aziz ibn Rasheed was killed in battle, and the rapid succession of a number of boy princes further weakened the Rasheed cause.

The gradually increasing strength of the Sauds caused the Rasheeds to appeal for help to the Turks, and an Ottoman Army appeared in Central Arabia. In 1912 Ibn Saud concluded a pact with Great Britain.

Thus this local Arabian feud fell into the picture of the Great Powers. When war broke out in 1915 between Turkey and Great Britain, the Rasheeds espoused the Turkish cause. Great Britain sent Captain Shakespeare to Ibn Saud to persuade him to attack Ibn Rasheed. A drawn battle was fought between the two princes at Jarab, but in this action Captain Shakespeare was killed. Thereafter Ibn Saud remained passive until the end of the war. In 1920 he advanced against the Rasheed capital of Hail and captured it. The surviving members of the Rasheed family were carried to Riyadh as prisoners, and the Sauds once more became the sole rulers of Nejd.

The original rise of the Saud family at the end of the eighteenth century had been made possible by their close connection with the Wahhabi religious movement and the enthusiasm it evoked. When Abdul Aziz ibn Saud set out to revive the fortunes of his family at the beginning of the twentieth century, he followed the policy of his ancestors. An immense revival of religious enthusiasm was organized. With the fall of the Rasheeds in 1920, the Arabian cauldron boiled over once more as it had in the seventh and the eighteenth centuries. Hordes of lean, wild bedouins, half-drunk with religious fervour, fell upon and massacred the border tribes in Trans-Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait. The greater part of Ibn Rasheed's tribe, Shammar, fled to Iraq. It was they whom I had seen crossing the Euphrates at Ramadi.

In 1926 I had resigned my commission in the British Army, and accepted a civilian appointment as an Administrative Inspector under the Iraq Government. For two years I was engrossed in the administration, revenue development and education of a large area on the Euphrates.

From 1920 to 1925 the tribes of Iraq and Trans-Jordan lived in constant terror of raids by the Ikhwan or brethren, as the Wahhabis had now called themselves. That they nearly captured Amman itself has been related in a previous chapter. After 1925, however, a welcome lull succeeded the previous raids on the Iraq and Trans-Jordan frontiers. Ibn Saud and the Ikhwan had invaded the Hejaz and driven King Husain from his throne. The operations in the field, the siege of the port of Jedda, and the extension of Wahhabi control to the Hejaz had satiated them for the time being with plunder.

But in 1928 signs of fresh trouble appeared. For more than twenty years the Ikhwan had gone forward from victory to victory, fired not only by love of war and plunder, but also by genuine, not to say fanatical, religious enthusiasm. Always their belief had been that they themselves, the Wahhabis, were the only true Muslims, and that all others had fallen into heresy—into idolatry, smoking, drinking, luxury—in a word, into the “association” of others with God, the worship of strange gods and worldly lusts. All the world but themselves were “mushrikin” or associaters, and it was the sacred task of the only remaining Muslims to return the backsliders to the true and primitive faith, or to put every male to the sword. This simple creed had made them for twenty years well-nigh invincible, and had sufficed to overthrow both Ibn Rasheed and King Husain of the Hejaz, and to unite all Central Arabia into a new Power, now proclaimed as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud was no narrow fanatic, but a statesman of wide vision. He realized that on the north his frontiers now marched with the two mandated territories of Iraq and Trans-Jordan, where the armies of the Muslimin might encounter, not enemies of flesh and blood, but aircraft and armoured vehicles. The battle of Ziza had shown what that might mean. But to the Ikhwan tribes, counsels of moderation were anathema. For a generation they had been told that God had laid on them the task of converting the world by the sword. The people of Iraq and Trans-Jordan were certainly not true Wahhabis, so what pretext had they for not offering them also the choice between conversion or the sword? Moreover, the Ikhwan had grown rich

on plunder. If war were now to cease, were they to return to poverty?

The debate waxed hot, and by a tragic irony, it was Ibn Saud's oldest and most trusted "ironsides" who protested most bitterly against his new policy of peace and moderation. At length, in 1927, the leaders of three of the most powerful tribes—Feisal Al Duwish of Mutair, Sultan ibn Humaid of Ateiba, and Dhaidan ibn Hithlain of the Ajman, decided to defy the King's authority. But to rebel directly and attack the King's forces would have been impossible to justify on grounds of religion. Their rebellion therefore took the form of an attack on Iraq, in defiance of Ibn Saud's prohibition. The rebels were able to argue that if the King had become lax in the religious duty of forcibly converting the infidels, they at least were still ready to give their lives in God's cause, until He should once more touch the King's conscience and cause him again to take up the sword in accordance with the Divine Will. But while such words seemed plausible enough, there could be no doubt that if the Ikhwan waged war independently on Iraq, against the orders of Ibn Saud, then the King's authority was gone and Central Arabia would sooner or later relapse into anarchy.

For a year and a half, the Ikhwan tribes waged an independent war on Iraq, without the consent of their King. Ibn Saud at first endeavoured to control them by expostulation, then by edicts pronounced by religious leaders—but all was in vain. At length he was obliged to take up arms and engage in fratricidal strife with the Ikhwan, his brethren. In the summer of 1929 he reduced the Ateibah. In the following winter he engaged Feisal Al Duwish of Mutair, and his allies, and completely defeated them. During this year and a half of war, I had been on special duty with the Iraq tribes, against whom the rebel Ikhwan were operating.

Although the attention of the Iraq Government had for some years been focused on the desert, largely owing to the continued hostilities with the Ikhwan, the Trans-Jordan Government had not as yet attempted to establish regular administration in its deserts. It was not until the summer of 1930 that the decision to put an end to desert raiding was taken. Owing to my past desert experience in Iraq, I was in the autumn of that year offered an

appointment in the Arab Legion, with the particular task of putting an end to tribal raiding. I arrived in Amman in November 1930.

The Ottoman Government had never made any attempt to administer the desert or the nomadic tribes. The various Governments which succeeded the Turks inherited this tradition, and had no wish to depart from it. Once they had established control in the cultivated and settled area, they considered their task accomplished and viewed the chaos of the desert with indifference. But after 1920 two factors combined to render their attitude untenable. The first was the increasing amount of traffic across the desert, whether by air or by car, a feature entirely unknown in Turkish times. This traffic was constantly at the mercy of raiders or robbers. The second was the raids and counter-raids with the Ikhwan. Until 1930 it so happened that few important traffic routes crossed the Trans-Jordan deserts, and thus the Government had not been obliged to extend its control to cover such communications. It was the situation on the frontier between Trans-Jordan and Saudi Arabia which eventually made action unavoidable.

Throughout the 1920's, the Trans-Jordan tribes were continually exposed to raids by the Ikhwan. In 1926 the British Government became by treaty responsible for the defence of Trans-Jordan against external attack, and also for the conduct of her external relations. Whether by diplomacy or in arms, it therefore became the responsibility of Great Britain to defend her from raids. For many years, however, the Trans-Jordan nomads had suffered heavy losses in both flocks and human life from Ikhwan raids, and had seen no help from the Government. Being themselves bold and experienced raiders, they had attempted to hold their own by raiding back. When at length the British Government intervened to secure a cessation of hostilities, each side laid the blame on the other, and offered to stop if the other side would do so. This was a vicious circle leading nowhere, and while the diplomatic despatches travelled back and forth between Mecca, Whitehall and Amman, unrestricted raiding and bloodshed continued.

The Ikhwan had a carefully organized military technique. Their attacks were preceded by a spate of contradictory rumours, to confuse their victims. Then, in a sudden swift approach march, they pounced on their objective. An isolated camp was attacked at dawn, a wild charge, the slaughter of all males, the looting of all the animals, tents and gear. In other words, on the Ikhwan side was organization, discipline, a system of tactics and strategy, and the terror inspired by long years of victory and by ruthless methods. Against this war machine, carefully trained, forged and tested for many years, the Trans-Jordan tribes could offer little opposition. For they themselves were divided and had no leader. They were also, of course, greatly outnumbered, and as time went on they became weaker and weaker, in manpower, in weapons and in animals.

During the Ikhwan rebellion in the years 1928 and 1929, the odds became less uneven, for the Saudi Government and the Ikhwan were engaged in civil war. The Trans-Jordan tribes made the best of the opportunity to recoup the losses which they had suffered in the previous years. Ibn Saud, his hands too full elsewhere, could do little but protest through diplomatic channels to London. But no sooner had the Ikhwan rebellion been suppressed in the spring of 1930, than he sent large forces to attack and punish the Huwaitat, the tribe which had been most active against him. The Amir Abdul Aziz ibn Musaad, a cousin of the King himself, surprised the Huwaitat at dawn one morning in March 1930, and stripped them of vast numbers of animals and tents, more than they had painfully acquired in their past two years of raiding. A second force advanced simultaneously from the south and fell upon another section of the same tribe. The Huwaitat streamed back westwards to the shelter of the railway line, in distress and confusion, many destitute, some even struggling across the desert on foot, others urging their surviving flocks with all speed to safety. But just at that moment, an unseasonable blizzard of snow swept down into their faces from the hills. Many camels and whole flocks of sheep, already driven to exhaustion in their flight from the dreaded war banners, died of cold and debility. The wreckage of the tribe reached the vicinity of the railway line, many of them without tents, food, clothing or animals.

But even for this crisis, the Huwaitat could think of no solution but to raid again. Soon the lean swarthy figures, half dressed in rags, were out to the east again, worming their way unseen along the desert hollows, crawling to the top of every hill to scan the horizon with binoculars, then cutting out some isolated herd—a wild charge, a few scattered shots, and another flock of camels was making for the west, driven forward by a dozen gaunt riders, who glanced apprehensively over their shoulders as they kicked their weary camels along at a swift trot.

But while Ibn Saud had struck directly and heavily against the Huwaitat, he had not laid aside diplomacy. His complaints to Whitehall continued to grow louder. His Majesty's Government did not neglect to pass on to the Trans-Jordan Government protests scarcely less vigorous than it received from the Saudis. The Huwaitat must be prevented from raiding Ibn Saud, at almost any cost. It was decided to employ Imperial troops, and while the Huwaitat were still reeling under the blows of the Saudi raids, they found themselves suddenly surrounded and called to book by British soldiers.

The powers that be had in reality not visualized the situation quite in focus. For here was a war—and a war which had been going on for ten years. It was impossible to say who started it, and, anyhow, in long wars the original *casus belli* is usually forgotten. But the fact remained that for many years both sides had been raiding, and both sides expressed their willingness to stop if the other side stopped first. Meanwhile troops and armoured cars moved out into the desert to control the Huwaitat, while aircraft hummed overhead. Presumably if His Majesty's Government had thought about it, they would have admitted that the troops were intended not only to prevent the Huwaitat from raiding but also from being raided. But in practice the whole emphasis in their orders was laid on the importance of preventing them from raiding and not on protecting them. Late in the summer of 1930, a section of the Huwaitat were camped at the well of Bair, with a detachment of troops to watch them, when their camels were actually raided and many flocks driven off when out at pasture. The herdsmen fled back to the camp, yelling and waving their cloaks. In a moment the camp was a

hive of activity, men and boys running to catch the horses and riding camels, the women following them, some carrying the mare's saddle, some the rifle and bandolier of a husband or son. In a few minutes horsemen and camelmen from here and there were galloping out of the camp, loading their rifles and settling themselves in the saddle as they rode.

The troops, who were not in perfect touch with the tribe, imagined that the whole excitement was a ruse, to enable the fighting men to get away from their supervision and to go out on a raid. They pursued in their vehicles and obliged the riders to turn back. The shaikhs excitedly explained that their camels had been looted, but that the raiders were still near and could be overtaken and obliged to give up their plunder. If they were forbidden to go, let the troops overtake the raiders, they begged. But the commander of the troops was clear as to his orders. He was to prevent the Huwaitat from raiding. There was nothing about chasing Saudi raiders in his instructions, but he agreed to refer the situation to headquarters for orders: Long before the orders came, the enemy had crossed the Saudi frontier and were safely in their own country, driving the Huwaiti<sup>1</sup> camels before them.

This incident, the kind of misunderstanding so liable to arise when troops engage in a new kind of war in a strange country, produced intense bitterness amongst the Huwaitat. They were convinced that the British had a secret agreement with Ibn Saud to destroy them. Thenceforward the Huwaitat hated the British, and particularly the troops, almost as intensely as they hated the Ikhwan, and their determination to go on raiding became harder and bitterer. Both sides engaged in a struggle of wits. The whole desert was dotted with chains of small military detachments, joined to one another by continual patrols. Every detachment was in touch with the others by wireless. Aircraft patrolled overhead. It was not possible now for bodies of raiders to move by day.

But the Huwaitat were determined, and the desert was their home. In many cases, they agreed to meet beyond the Saudi frontier, which the troops were forbidden to cross. Each individual man found his way to the frontier alone. Others travelled only at

<sup>1</sup> "Huwaiti" is the singular form; "Huwaitat" the plural.



night, and passed the hours of daylight crouching in a few bushes in a small valley. Many picked their way cautiously from rough stony valley to sandy dune, following country in which mechanical vehicles could pursue them only with difficulty. So much for the outgoing raiding party, but how were flocks of looted camels to be brought back unperceived? Even this the Huwaitat contrived. In some cases they loaded gear on to the looted camels and persons dressed as women, and thereby passed through the patrols as a nomadic tribe on the move.

Thus when the troops thought that they were getting the situation in hand, suddenly fresh and more forcible protests arrived from Ibn Saud, who claimed that the number of raids had not abated. The Government blamed the troops, and both the troops and the tribes became more and more embittered. A special court was established to try raiders and sentence them to exemplary punishment, but the court needed evidence and rarely if ever was any forthcoming. The troops would pick up two men riding camels. They were probably part of a raiding party, but they claimed to be looking for a lost mare. They would be arrested, put up for trial and acquitted. Immediately they returned home they would set out raiding again.

An Arab tribe is usually full of rival claimants to leadership, family feuds and jealousies. Informers are only too willing to give malicious reports against their fellows. But in this crisis, the Huwaitat were solid, and no tribesman would give a raider away. The height of absurdity would be reached when an army or R.A.F. patrol stopped at some bedouin camp. The patrol commander would call up a man from one of the tents and ask him to what tribe the tents belonged.

The bedouin—"I don't know."

Patrol Commander—"But you must know—is not that your tent and family?"

Bedouin—"I don't know."

Patrol Commander—"Are these people Huwaitat?"

Bedouin—"I don't know."

Patrol Commander—"Where are the Huwaitat camped?"

Bedouin—"I don't know."

Patrol Commander—"What is your name?"

Bedouin—"I don't know."

And so on indefinitely.

But with all this determination, the Huwaitat were committing suicide. Harassed by their own Government on the one side and raided by Ibn Saud on the other, they were rapidly becoming so poor that many were already starving and few if any were properly nourished and clothed. There could be only one end to so senseless and obstinate a struggle—the virtual extinction of the Huwaitat as a tribe.

I arrived in Amman in November 1930, and stayed at the British Residency with Colonel (later Sir Henry) Cox. Peake Pasha, the Commander of the Arab Legion, was on leave in England. I prepared a budget to cover the cost of a small police force of ninety men, which I proposed to raise from the tribes. I then bought a car and set out for the desert. My situation was at first somewhat anomalous. I had no authority over anyone, and, being dressed as a civilian with no particular status, the troops naturally were inclined to regard me as something of an outsider. The tribes were unwilling to have anything to do with anyone who came to them from the Government. I decided to hear the tribal point of view before deciding what course to recommend.

The greater part of the desert of Trans-Jordan between the railway and the Wadi as Sirhan consists of rolling hills cut by a number of dry water-courses or wadis, flowing on the west through the hills to the Dead Sea and on the east to the Wadi as Sirhan depression. At the extreme south the area is closed by a range of mountains known as Tubaiq, and running east and west along the Trans-Jordan-Saudi border. West of the railway this range is continued in a block of mountains called Hesma.

I spent several weeks in my car, with only my driver and a bedouin guide, wandering from one group of tents to another on these rolling, flint-strewn hills. Everywhere I met the same extreme poverty, the tiny ragged tents and the haggard people half dressed in torn clothes, contrasting vividly with the dignified tribal shaikhs with their flowing robes to whom I had become accustomed in Iraq. Everywhere also I met the same intense bitterness against the Government and the troops, and the same belief that

the British were in secret agreement with Ibn Saud to destroy them.

In each little group of tents, I held interminable discussions. My line of argument was that the tribe was destroying itself. Whatever might be the rights or wrongs of the case, it was obvious that one tribe, already greatly impoverished, could not continue to defy Ibn Saud, the Trans-Jordan Government and Great Britain, all at the same time. Their present course must be wrong and could end only in destroying themselves. Most of them eventually agreed with me, but asked hopelessly what was to be done. I could not tell them at once, but at least these heart-to-heart talks did something to win me their confidence.

The charm of desert nights never palls. I remember hearing a story—I forget from whom—of King Feisal of Iraq, who was a guest at a dinner party in London. The hostess asked him what had been the happiest moment in his life. King Feisal had tasted many moments of triumph, and sufficient disasters to give savour to the successes. Would he reply that the happiest moment of his life was when he made his triumphant entry into Damascus in 1918, or when he heard of his election to the throne of Iraq, or the day of his coronation in Baghdad? "The happiest moment of my life," replied the King, "is when I and a friend are riding silently across the desert on our camels by moonlight."

Only those who have experienced them can understand the joys of evening in the desert, seated in a circle round the camp-fire in the clean soft sand, beneath the sparkling Arab stars or in the still white light of the full moon. In the glowing embers stand the brass coffee-pots, from which are poured again and again the little cups of bitter coffee. Every now and then a new bush is thrown on the fire, which flares up suddenly to a bright flame, illuminating the lean figures seated around and filling the air with a sharp aromatic fragrance. In the background are the dark outlines of couched camels, which in intervals of the conversation can be heard slowly chewing the cud. The talk may last until after midnight, quiet, unending, unembarrassed, without subservience or familiarity. Indeed, the most attractive quality of tribesmen of the old school is that they are almost unaware of social distinctions, and thus are always natural. At first local

politics, grievances, poverty or raid losses may be discussed. But as familiarity increases we forget the poverty, the misery and the uncertainty of today, and out come the tales of the good old times, of deeds of raiding prowess, of noble gestures and fantastic hospitality. And when I get up now and again to stretch my cramped legs, a few yards away the great open desert, the cold sharp air, the silence so utter that not one sound can be distinguished by the ear. When I return to the circle, all stand up and then we resume our talk again. Every now and then one of the figures round the fire gets up in silence and, walking away a few yards into the darkness, wraps his cloak around him and lies down with a fragrant desert bush for his pillow. It is often three in the morning when I rise at last, too exhausted to feel sleepy, but with aching back and tired limbs, and roll myself in my sheepskin cloak in a cool sandy hollow. For a minute I look at the black outline of the hills against the bright sharp stars and feel in my nostrils the fragrance of desert air, and then sleep.

On the southern frontier of the Trans-Jordan desert lie the mountains of Tubaiq, a range of sandstone mountains running east and west, 150 miles long. At their highest point, a flat rocky plateau, they are broken up by great gorges hundreds of feet deep. Here and there tower precipices of sandstone—thousands of feet of sheer rock. Narrow valleys and clefts in the rocks near the summits are choked by drifts of loose sand, which lies banked up against the foot of the precipices like snowdrifts around the peaks of the Alps. Rain rarely falls in Tubaiq, and when it does so it sinks quickly into the sand. Only a few hollows in the rock catch a little water from which men or animals may drink.

In January 1931 a heavy fall of rain had left a few rain pools in Tubaiq, and some sections of the Huwaitat migrated there. Although the mountains were regarded as quite impassable to wheels, I resolved to reconnoitre. At the foot of the first cliffs but still moving along the plain, we found a small section on the move. Half a dozen men were riding camels in front of the party, while others walked behind the laden camels on which were precariously balanced women, babies, pots and pans, sacks of food and gay red quilts. A flock of goats in the charge of a small boy brought up the rear.

This peaceful and patriarchal scene was transformed in a second into wild panic by the appearance of our car, lurching over the shrubs and rocks. The camelmenn slipped from the backs of their camels, and rifle in hand ran like greyhounds for the cliffs. The women and children followed to the best of their ability. Two or three laden camels panicked and lumbered away across the plains, shedding pots and pans, quilts and carpets as they ran.

We stopped, descended from the car, waved our cloaks and shouted, but all to no effect. The heavier camels were standing irresolute, slowly turning their heads to gaze in mild surprise, first after their fleeing owners and then around the landscape in general. On the back of one hung little bundles of rags, an old tin can and a battered kettle without a lid—the pathetic possessions of the very poor. We drove to where the rocky ground rose steeply, with drifts of sand between the boulders, and got out. There were only three of us, two bedouin guides and myself. We ran up a rocky spur and waved our cloaks. "O men!" cried the bedouins, "we are friends! It is I—Kuraiyim—Kuraiyim ibn Ati-i-i-ya!" But nobody listened. On the cliffs opposite, we could see the lithe ragged figures still climbing, jumping lightly from rock to rock. At last the men sat down high above us, their rifles across their knees, and waited. Again we shouted and waved, but to no avail. To these people, a car meant the Government, and the Government was a vast hostile power, always to be avoided.

We gave it up, slid down from our rocky crag to where the camels were still standing, gazing slowly to right and left. The shepherd boy safely ensconced on a shelf of rock was calling to his goats, which cantered pit-a-pat across the plain and then jumped from rock to rock up the cliff, seeking that well-known shrill little voice. We re-entered our car and drove back towards the west. Visitors were apparently not welcome in Tubaiq.

The difficulty of understanding the point of view of the tribes on the one hand and of the Government on the other was by no means the only worry in these first weeks. We constantly received rumours and warnings of intended Saudi raids. Ibrahim Al Neshmi, who had riaded the Huwaitat the year before at Ibn



Desert Patrol, 1931

NAWAB SALAR JUNG BAHADUR



Camel Patrols in the Tubaiq mountains

Saud's orders, was reported to be beyond the border with several war banners, awaiting an opportunity to attack.

The Ikhwan technique comprised a slow approach march to within about seventy miles of the objective, and then the traversing of the last seventy miles in a single night's march to surprise their victims at dawn. Our own troops were forbidden, for diplomatic reasons, to cross the Saudi frontier and were thus unable to put out pickets or send out patrols. The enemy could start his night march forty or fifty miles beyond the frontier, far out of sight, and at dawn next morning he would be attacking a camp well inside Trans-Jordan. There was no means of intercepting him before he could attack. The remedy for this dilemma adopted by the forces was to instruct all the tribes to move back a distance of sixty miles from the frontier, allowing a no-man's-land in which the troops would have a chance of intercepting the enemy.

Only those who have lived with nomads can realize the impossibility of this solution, for grazing is the life-blood of the bedouin. No tribe could abandon a grazing area a hundred miles long and sixty wide. Such a course would be as destructive as a major battle, and insufficient grazing means not only a high mortality in animals, it also means that the surviving stock will be so thin that they will not be saleable in the spring, and the bedouin family will be without money to buy food.

I was obliged thus to consider an alternative. My plan was that the tribe should graze and camp right up to the frontier, but should protect itself from raids by picketing all the wells across the border in Saudi Arabia. We organized a considerable number of tribal pickets, each consisting of six or eight horsemen, and accompanied by one or two camels, which carried grain for the horses and rations for the men. Each was to base itself on a different well and to be responsible for a certain frontage. In the event of the pickets locating a large enemy raiding party, they were to abandon their baggage camels and gear, and to ride for their lives to warn the tribe. The men of the pickets were to be paid by me, with a small sum of money which I had obtained from the Government. I saw all the pickets go out myself and gave them their instructions.



When this system of protection had been arranged, I felt a little easier in my mind. I was working steadily on public opinion in the tribe, and I felt that I was gaining some support amongst the tribesmen. But all the ground already gained would have been lost again if a raid from Saudi Arabia had meanwhile fallen upon them. It was essential to secure a respite from Saudi raids in order to talk the Huwaitat round.

One of these mounted pickets had been sent out from a section of the tribe called the Khushman. One morning I was driving in my solitary car through a small camp, when I saw standing, in front of a tent, the man who was supposed to be commanding the Khushman picket, covering a well forty miles across the border. I left my car and walked up to him to make certain. "Aren't you Felah Al Khushman, and weren't you in command of one of the pickets?" I asked. "Why are you not out at your place?" "Oh, I had something to do in camp," he said. "Besides which the Ikhwan are not raiding—those reports were lies."

This was more than I could bear. I had arranged the whole system of pickets so as not to deprive the tribe of grazing, and I was also paying them to do it. And here was one of the commanders calmly resting by his tent. Unless I had seen him, he would of course have come up at the end of his tour of duty and demanded his pay. Perhaps I was tired with long nights and days in the desert, the anxiety of reconciling the tribes and the troops and fear of Saudi raids. I lost my temper, and walking up to the man, I struck his sneering face with my fist. I then went back to my car and drove away.

An hour later I was driving back the same way when I saw three camelmen riding to intercept me and waving their cloaks. Stopping the car, I walked to meet them, thinking they might have news from the pickets. When they were twenty yards away, one of them kicked his camel and dashed forward in front of his companions. As he did so, he reached for his rifle from behind the saddle, and drawing back the bolt and pushing a round into the chamber, he rode straight for me. "Did you strike my brother?" he screamed.

I was standing alone and unarmed on a flat piece of desert. Near by my driver, also unarmed, sat in the car. I saw for an in-

stant a dark bearded face, with wild matted hair hanging over the eyes. Then the camel swerved past me, and I saw my assailant drop a hand from his rifle to catch the camel's rein. By the time he had pulled up and turned round, his companions had arrived and were urging moderation, "Take it easy, Abdulla." "Go slow, man!" I was angry myself now. "Yes, I hit your brother," I said, "and I'll teach you a lesson too."

Five miles away a small detachment of the Frontier Force was camped with a British officer, who rose greatly to the occasion. "May I have all your available men for a little job?" I asked him. Without further ado, he turned out his troops and placed them under my command. Twenty minutes after my passage with the camel riders, I returned in the Buick, followed by three trucks full of soldiers. We avoided the tents, and made for three flocks of camels grazing a mile away. Travelling in line ahead, we drove round the flocks, and then wheeling up behind them, we soon had over a hundred camels trotting in front of us, with the three trucks of soldiers bringing up the rear. Not a soul stirred from the tents, although our manoeuvre was in full view. Having handed over the loot to the Frontier Force, I retired in the Buick to a neighbouring valley to eat my lunch and await developments. It was their move.

Two hours later, a party of camelmen rode up and, couching their camels, advanced in a dignified manner. "Peace be upon you," they said. We laid out a blanket for the visitors, invited them to sit down and began to make tea. After a few preliminary politenesses, the deputation explained deprecatingly that the Khushman had made a mistake, being poor ignorant fellows unused to dealing with Governments, and in any case forgiveness was the finest attribute of a ruler.

We told them to tell the Khushman not to be naughty again, and gave them back the camels. This incident, which occurred in so spontaneous and unpremeditated a way, was the first step in showing the Huwaitat that times had changed. A regular Government would have issued a warrant of arrest against the man who had threatened me, would never have caught him, and would thus have shown its impotence. Our unconventional procedure had undoubtedly left the last word with us. I went up to thank

the Frontier Force, and enjoy a quiet cup with their co-operative commander.

On one of my tours round the Huwaitat, I stopped to spend the night at the tent of Jaraiyid Abu Smaih, the shaikh of the Smaihiyeen section of the tribe. It was my first visit to this section, who seemed cordial and friendly. The night was chilly, and we saw with pleasure the arrival of the usual vast dish laden with steaming rice and boiled mutton. After dinner, feeling comfortably fed and just tired enough to appreciate the comfort and warmth, we gathered round the fire and prepared for a pleasant evening's talk. Jaraiyid our host went out of the tent for a moment, to fetch some small requirement, when suddenly the crack of a rifle shot rang out so near as to leave our ears singing. We jumped to our feet and ran out into the darkness. Four or five paces from the tent, a dark figure lay on the ground. Somebody turned it over. It was our host Jaraiyid, already dead, the blood streaming over his face and shoulders.

There was a moment of excitement during which everybody seized his weapons, some saddled horses, while others ran out of the camp to search the ground near by. But nobody was to be found. A party eventually set out in pursuit of the supposed murderers—a forlorn hope, indeed, for no tracks had been found, no strange figures seen, and the unlimited vastness of the desert lay in silent darkness all around the camp.

We returned disconsolately to the tent, but the body had been brought in, and the atmosphere of sudden tragedy was unbearable. The moon had risen, and we wandered out and lay in the desert, where the vast silence was bathed in eerie white light. A few members of the tribe joined us and, talking in low voices, we heard the story. All were convinced that the murderer was Audah ibn Za'al, a man of Abu Taya's section of the Huwaitat.

It appeared that some years before, Audah ibn Za'al had crossed the frontier and paid taxes to Saudi Arabia. Anxious presumably to gain favour with the Saudi authorities, he had acted as guide to a party of Saudi tax-collectors, who wished to collect money from other families of the Huwaitat. The party had chanced on the Smaihiyeen section, who, however, had refused to pay taxes, claiming to be camped in Trans-Jordan. A skirmish

ensued between the Smaihyeen section and the Saudi soldiers. A man of the Smaihyeen was killed and a number of their camels driven off.

Unable to revenge themselves on the Saudi Government, the Smaihyeen blamed Audah ibn Za'al. They claimed that he had caused the whole incident by acting as guide to the tax-collectors. Moreover, he was a fellow tribesman, a fact which made his offence infinitely more heinous in their eyes. Tribal solidarity was the basis of bedouin life. The Smaihyeen accordingly held Audah responsible for the death of their cousin, killed by the Saudi soldiers. They determined on revenge. A man of the Smaihyeen went to Audah's tent. He saw a man asleep in the tent, wrapped in his cloak. Assuming him to be Audah, he shot him dead and escaped.

As it chanced, the man thus murdered in his sleep was not Audah at all, but a guest belonging to the Ruwallah tribe. The incident served only to exacerbate the feud. To defend his guest from molestation is one of the first duties of an Arab. Audah demanded quadruple vengeance for the murder of his guest. The shooting of our host Jaraiyid Abu Smaih was Audah's revenge for the killing of the man of the Ruwallah, itself Abu Smaih's revenge for the killing of his cousin by the Saudis. Such in the old days were the blood-soaked annals of the desert.

Tales of hatred and violence were only too common amongst all Arab tribes. But all the tribes of which I had previous experience would have hesitated to commit such a crime in the very presence of a Government officer. Only the Huwaitat, the wildest and most anarchic tribe I had yet met, would have shot my host while I was in his tent, and only four paces from where I was sitting. The Smaihyeen were quick to perceive the insult to the Government and to rub it in to me as best they could.

The morning confirmed the truth of their suspicions. Audah ibn Za'al and two of his cousins, their tents, families and flocks, had disappeared completely overnight. Two days later a report was received that they were camped on the highest plateau of Tubaiq, an area into which it was believed the Government could not penetrate. We set off in my car, myself, the driver and two bedouins, to carry out a reconnaissance.

Three hours' bumping across flint-strewn desert and wadis filled with small bushes brought us to the foot of the mountain wall which stretched right and left as far as the eye could see. Immediately in front of us lay a line of cliffs perhaps six hundred to eight hundred feet high of almost black sandstone, broken by promontories and re-entrants, and with here and there isolated islands and "table mountains" as though they had been cut off from the main cliffs by the action of Atlantic storms. All along the foot of the cliffs and blocking the entrance to all the bays lay a long line of sand-dunes, perhaps fifty to a hundred feet high. Sand was also sprinkled all up the sides of the cliffs and on the ledges and rocky slopes, like snow clinging to the face of an Alpine precipice after a blizzard.

In front of us, as it happened, the high cliffs ran back into a bay, but the entrance from cape to cape was closed by a long sand-dune, sixty or seventy feet high, and meeting the cliffs on either side. Further progress seemed impossible. I noticed a few pieces of rock protruding through the sand, exactly where the sand-dune met the cliff. It occurred to me that it might be possible to work the car up where the sand joined the rocky cliffs, by laying pieces of broken rock on the sand and by putting sand over rough places in the rock. After two hours' work we succeeded in pushing the car to the top of the dune immediately against the cliff face. But when we reached the top of the dune, we saw in front of us half a mile of sand, slightly undulating like a long Atlantic swell. Moreover, the rocky ledge on which the car was perched was too small to turn round on. There appeared to be no way of going either forward or back.

At length I saw another and a wider rocky ledge, about a hundred yards ahead. The only course seemed to be to try to cross the hundred yards of sand to this ledge, turn on it and come back. I backed the car to the farthest edge of the ledge, thereby gaining a running start of about three yards, and then shot forward on to the sand.

To my surprise, I found the car skimming lightly over the surface. Avoiding the next ledge, I flew over half a mile of undulating dunes, and dropped down a steep sandy slope into a rocky hollow. We were inside Tubaiq.

It was as though we were, indeed, in a new world. Behind us lay the long wall of sand. In front we found ourselves in a gorge enclosed on both sides by black cliffs. The floor of the gorge was sand, with patches of gravel here and there, and covered with graceful feathery *ghadha* bushes, ten or twelve feet high. This bush is more like broom than anything else, but finer, and develops a gnarled white trunk. The whole valley was dotted with these graceful bushes, which sighed in the wind. Between the living bushes, the surface of the sand was strewn with the white skeletons of dead trunks and branches.

The whole place had a silent and virgin feeling about it, as though it were the mountains of the moon. The clean white sand seemed never to have been trodden by the foot of man. This was, of course, not the case, for the tribes periodically passed this way, but it was quite possible that this valley had not been visited by man for two or three years. Nor is it likely that it had ever been seen by a European, and it is absolutely certain that it had never before been crossed by wheels.

We drove on cautiously up the gorge, for perhaps two hours. Only once or twice did we stick in the sand. The cliffs on either side became lower and lower, or rather the floor of the gorge rose and rose until it was nearly on the level of the cliffs. The valley eventually ended in a wall of sheer rock about fifty feet high, which even the Buick could not negotiate. We climbed it on foot, and emerged on the narrow plateau which formed the summit of the range, somewhere near the place where our murderer himself was reported to be taking refuge. We remembered that we had come sixty miles, a good deal of it in virgin country where no one would ever think of looking for us, and that there were only four of us with two rifles between us. We decided to postpone further pursuit of the murderer, scrambled down our cliff, and flew down the valley again, the Buick sailing over the rolling dunes as lightly as a bird. Our two bedouins burst into song—we had violated the virginity of Tubaiq.

As my own forces still consisted of myself, my driver and two bedouins, the Tubaiq situation had to be referred to the Imperial troops. The R.A.F. were enthusiastic, the Frontier Force willing as ever. A party of Frontier Force with bedouin guides were to

climb the range from the west on camels. I myself with the Frontier Force Commander, Major Buller, was to lead a mechanized column up the valley which we had discovered. The R.A.F. was to co-operate in the air. Everything went well. The mechanized column duly reached the rock wall at the top of the valley, which we climbed on foot, and established ourselves in the centre of the plateau above. Here we met the camel column and made camp. A landing-strip was marked out, aircraft landed beside us, and I took off from the plateau for an air reconnaissance. Whereas on the north, the direction from which we had come, the range was cut up by innumerable deep parallel gorges like the one we had come up, on the south the plateau ended in a single cliff, perhaps over 2,000 feet sheer drop, as far as we could see to east and west. Beyond it, stretched a vast sandy sea as far as the eye could reach, down into Saudi Arabia. Tubaiq itself was a wild tangle of black peaks and cliffs, sprinkled everywhere with drifts and banks of sand between the rocks.

It is true that there was no sign of our murderer Audah ibn Za'al. He had taken fright and fled to Ibn Saud, but at least we had chased him hot-foot out of the country. The effect on the Huwaitat was profound, for much of their defiance and their wildness was due to the belief that in Tubaiq they had an inviolable refuge which Government forces could never enter. In a few hours, two columns of troops had marched straight through the mountains, and aircraft had landed and taken off from the summit of the range. Murderers would in future have to go farther afield.

# V

## *The Desert Patrol*

"A few honest men are better than a multitude."

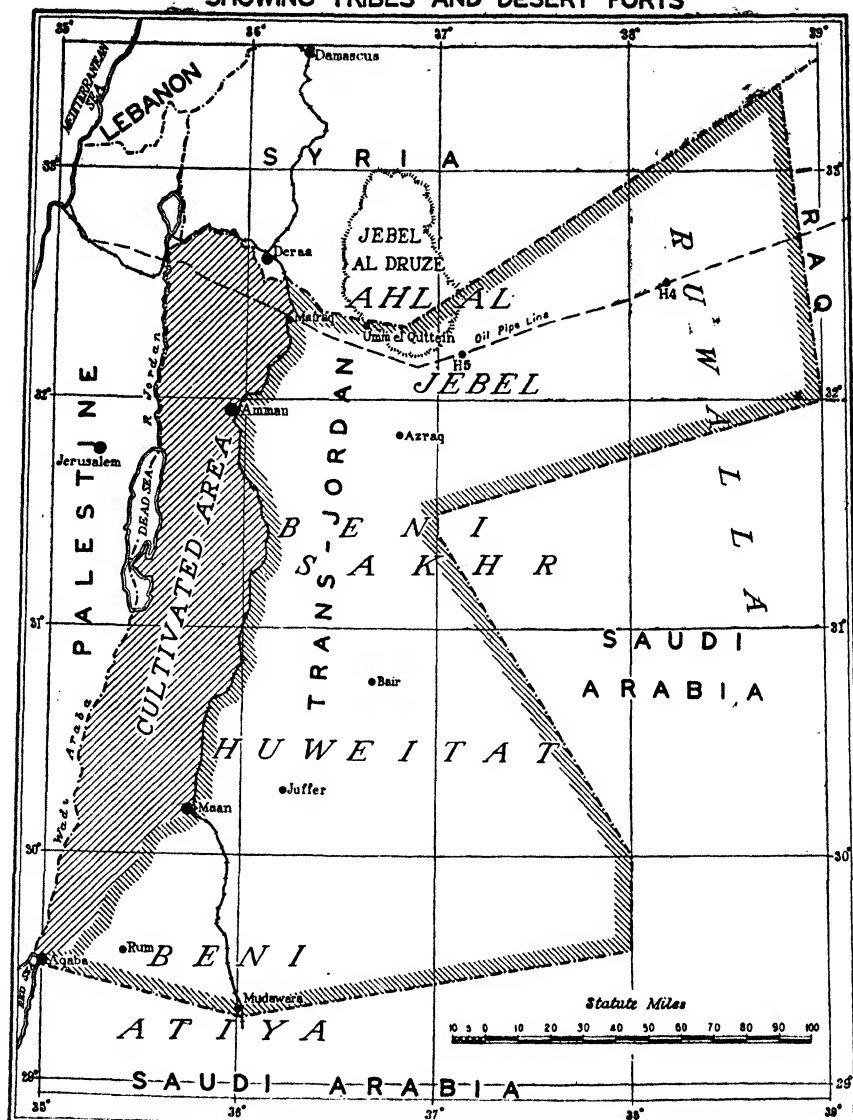
OLIVER CROMWELL.

"Plowmen, shepherds have I found and more than once and still could find,  
Sons of God and Kings of Men in utter nobleness of mind."

TENNYSON: "Locksley Hall."



# THE DESERT AREA SHOWING TRIBES AND DESERT FORTS



Drawn by Farid Asar, Amman, Trans-Jordan

## KEY

Boundary of Desert Area.....  
 Boundary of Trans-Jordan.....  
 Desert Forts.....  
 Tribes.....  
 HUWEITAT

## THE DESERT PATROL

MY preliminary reconnaissances of the Huwaiti situation had taken about two months, and it was now mid-January 1931. I had reached the conclusion that the only way to do anything with the Huwaitat was to withdraw all the troops from the desert. The resentment between the troops and the tribes was such that the latter were embittered against Great Britain and the Trans-Jordan Government as a whole. Moreover, the troops were in no sense under my command, a fact which revealed an inevitable lack of co-ordination. For I was living in a car in the desert, while the commanders of the Imperial troops were in Amman or Jerusalem.

Both the R.A.F. and the soldiers had been working very hard for six months, living in the desert in extreme discomfort and flying for long and monotonous hours seeing nothing. It was scarcely to be expected that they would be flattered at being told that the situation would be better without them. But they accepted my suggestion amicably, and it was decided that all Imperial troops should be withdrawn on the first of February 1931. The majority anticipated that their departure would result in intensified raiding, and that they would be ordered back to the desert again within three weeks of their withdrawal.

But while their mission had not been entirely successful and had failed to restore peace and harmony to the desert, it had been by no means fruitless. It is, indeed, probable that their presence alone prevented further heavy Ikhwan raids on the Huwaitat. Their efforts had compelled the Huwaitat to abandon raiding parties several hundred strong, and had compelled them to limit their efforts to small raids carried out by stealth.

My own plan was based on the psychological effect which I hoped would be produced by the removal of compulsion and by inviting the Huwaitat to run their own affairs. But this psycho-

logical effect was in itself largely the result of their satisfaction at the departure of the troops. If they had not previously suffered from the presence of the troops, they would quite possibly not have welcomed my proposals so warmly.

It was, nevertheless, with mixed feelings that I sat on the top of a low hill on the morning of the first of February 1931, and watched the dust of the last British column gradually vanish over the western horizon. Two miles to the east of where I sat lay the frontier of Saudi Arabia, and behind it perhaps those dreaded war banners of which we heard so many rumours.

In front of and around me, on the blue ridges and in the nearer valleys, I could see those little groups of dots, sometimes separating, sometimes coming together, which the desert dweller learns to recognize as flocks of grazing camels. In the middle distance two groups of black tents were pitched in a wide depression, by a green patch of grass on which grazed a flock of sheep. The whole wide scene was bathed in warm winter sunlight beneath a blue sky flecked with clouds.

Amman was 120 miles away, and I had no means of communication except the Buick in which I lived and moved. The field was clear and it was high time to get to work.

I spent a great part of my time going from camp to camp and talking. The burden of my argument was that the tribe would soon be ruined, if not exterminated, if it continued to defy both Ibn Saud and the Trans-Jordan Government. The only policy was to stop raiding voluntarily, and organize defence measures against Saudi raids. The Government had agreed to cease compulsion. It was up to the Huwaitat to decide on and execute their own policy. Moreover, I was ready to enlist soldiers from the Huwaitat themselves to enforce the policy we agreed upon.

My arguments were unexpectedly successful. One of our defensive patrols betrayed their trust, and went off on a private raid instead of picketing our front. One or two other very small marauding parties set out unknown to me, but, generally speaking, the Huwaitat ceased raiding, and waited to see what would happen next.

But enlist as soldiers they would not. The idea that the Government was their bitterest enemy was too deeply engrained in their

minds to admit such a novel idea. When the British troops withdrew, my forces which took over from them consisted of myself and one man—and he was a negro slave from Saudi Arabia.

A few days later, as we sat in the sun in a small desert valley near the frontier—for we still had no tents—I saw two figures walking towards me, one very tall and one very short. To my immense delight, they were two men who had served under me in Iraq, and who had resigned from the Iraq service and followed me to Trans-Jordan. Soon afterwards we acquired a man from the Shammar tribe, and now I had four soldiers but still no Huwaitat. These first enlistments, especially the men from Iraq, were of immense value, for they also were bedouins, and they were able to describe to the Huwaitat how we had raised a bedouin force in Iraq, and what a fine service it was. And their actions spoke more loudly than their words, for they had followed me across 500 miles of desert to re-enlist with me in Trans-Jordan. One day we received a volunteer from the Huwaitat, Awwadh ibn Hudeiba. Three days later an Arab Legion officer came out from Amman to issue uniforms and pay to our army of five men. He successfully gave them their uniforms, but insisted on their falling in and numbering from the right before he gave them pay. This regularity was too much for Awwadh ibn Hudeiba, who threw down his new uniform and walked away. No sooner did he return to his camp, than he set out with a raiding party.

A quick visit to Amman, however, produced three more volunteers, all Central Arabians, one of whom, Hamdan Al Biluwi, will be mentioned again. This army of eight men made the Huwaitat think again. For one thing, these men enlisting were all nomads like themselves. For another, as I carefully pointed out, I would get my men from somewhere or other. If the Huwaitat did not enlist, the result would be that their country would be policed by men of other tribes, not, as they hoped, that it would not be policed at all. This broke the ice, and before the end of February I had enlisted twenty men. Not only so, but we received our four trucks, and my two men from Iraq—Hedhlul and Ahmed Al Afaidli—had started to give instruction in the Lewis and Vickers guns. The Desert Patrol was launched on its career.

The Ikhwan method of attack was a wild charge into the camp at dawn. Defensive measures capable of repulsing these tactics were difficult to organize. To begin with, the necessity of grazing for their flocks impelled the tribes to scatter widely in search of grass, with the result that the enemy, who held the initiative, always overwhelmed one small camp after another. If a whole tribe were to be assembled in one camp, it was first necessary to find a water-point capable of watering them all. If this difficulty were overcome but the enemy's attack did not materialize at once, the grazing round this big concentration was soon exhausted. The animals grew weak or began to die, murmuring commenced, and tent after tent would be struck and sections and families would steal away in search of grass.

The decision when to form a defensive concentration was thus one of the most difficult a bedouin chief could be called on to make. If he delayed it too long, his tribe would be attacked and destroyed. If he concentrated too soon and the enemy attack did not materialize, the tribe might break up in search of grazing and could not be reconcentrated a second time when the enemy actually came.

These were what may be called the strategic difficulties of defence. The tactical problem was no less complicated, owing to the unwieldiness of the flocks. For a nomadic tribe might consist of perhaps a dozen camels and the same number of sheep for every fighting man. Determined riflemen in trenches or in broken country could probably have broken up an Ikhwan charge, but while they were doing so, who would take care of the flocks? Camels are, moreover, always liable to panic and stampede, and thus the raiders, even if repulsed by the men in trenches, would probably be able to round up most of the livestock, the whole wealth on which the tribe lived. In these circumstances, the tribes of Nejd, more experienced in set campaigns than the anarchic Huwaitat, had evolved a defensive technique. The tents were pitched close to one another in straight lines, and all the flocks brought into the camp between the tents. The camels were then couched on their knees and hobbled in that position. This formation, a kind of back-to-the-wall defence, was called "Now-wakh wa Aqal"—or couch and hobble.

A tribe thus formed in a solid mass—men, women and children, tents, camels and sheep—stood some chance of repulsing the mad charge which was the bedouin technique of attack. The weak point of the method was that the flocks could neither graze nor drink. If the enemy postponed his attack for a day or two, the flocks would have to be released to graze and water.

Soon after the withdrawal of the troops, a report reached us that Al Neshmi and his war banners were in the Wadi as Sirhan, within a single march of the Trans-Jordan frontier and many of our scattered camps. This type of warfare is to a great extent dependent on morale. I have often found that when I was afraid, the best course was to advance towards the enemy. I ordered the Huwaitat to couch and hobble at Imshash Hadraj, within a night's march of Neshmi's reported position.

The movement was not well carried out, nor did all the Huwaitat come, but we formed a considerable group of tents none the less. In the centre of our battle line, I placed the Buick and our four trucks, my twenty soldiers and four machine-guns which they had not yet learned how to use. Fortunately the enemy did not come. But the fact that, on receiving news of the supposed approach of those terrible banners, we had moved out to meet them and assumed a hostile attitude may have done something to impress both the Huwaitat and their enemies.

By the beginning of March things were improving. We now had tents, trucks, uniforms and about thirty soldiers, of whom enough had been trained to be able to fire the machine-guns. Raiding seemed to have virtually ceased, and the Ikhwan banners had not materialized. Then one day we received information that a raiding party of some thirty men of the Huwaitat had actually set out. They had left to the south through Tubaiq, and could scarcely return in less than ten days or a fortnight. It had, of course, been obvious that the centuries-old custom of raiding could not be stopped suddenly by sweet reasonableness. There would have to be a showdown sooner or later, and now the crisis had arrived.

With ten days in hand, I set to work to find out the names of as many of the raiders as I could. I had by now many converts

to my policy, who were ready to work for our success. Small cash rewards encouraged the doubting. Very soon we had a list of most of those who were away with the raiding party. We then embarked in our four trucks and set out to look for their tents.

Our information was confirmed by the fact that the tents we visited contained nobody but women. From each of them we collected all the camels we could find. Perhaps we took a few camels belonging to innocent people. A few of the raiders we missed. But within a couple of days, we had collected about two hundred and fifty camels without firing a shot, although we had to run the gauntlet of the tongues of some terrible old women, shrivelled and bent old hags like mediæval witches. Eventually we pitched camp a few miles away with our camels and awaited the return of the raiders.

During the ensuing three days, we were visited by the Amir Shakir, a cousin of His Highness the Amir Abdulla. He was accompanied by Mr. A. S. Kirkbride of the British Residency staff. The Amir Shakir was a true Arabian Prince of the old style. Although he had passed most of his life amongst bedouins, with whom he had raided, fought and lived, he had the presence, the ease and the manner of one who had lived his life as a courtier. Never did any man better deserve the hackneyed term of "Nature's gentleman" than did the Amir Shakir.

He had come out partly to see what was happening, for he was President of the Bedouin Control Board, the court especially charged with the trial and punishment of raiders. Since the departure of the British troops, he had received no raiders to try. His arrival at this moment was, however, embarrassing, for I had no legal power to seize the two hundred and fifty camels which he found, somewhat to his surprise, in my camp. According to the law, I should have awaited the return of the raiders and then arrested them, and sent them to the Amir Shakir's court for trial—a course not easy to follow because the raiders were more numerous than my own soldiers. Thus the Amir Shakir arrived just in time to find me illegally infringing what should have been his prerogative. Not only did he show no resentment, but expressed warm approval of my actions and promised me his

support. His help and friendship never failed me until his death four years later.

The Amir had heard that we had penetrated Tubaiq in cars, and wished to see the country himself. We set off with two of our trucks, armed with machine-guns, and skirted the eastern end of the range, and then returned westwards at the foot of the long line of cliffs which faced southwards. The country was utterly deserted and lifeless, with little if any vegetation, but the plain itself was scattered with fantastic out-crops of sandstone. Parallel to our course on the right towered that enormous black cliff wall, as far as the eye could see. Kicking at a white stone buried in the red sand, one of the men turned up a human skull, and scattered near by were other bones. It was Al Migyal, site of a great battle between the Huwaitat and Beni Sakhr two generations ago.

As we thus drove slowly along, stopping, dismounting, talking and examining the country, we saw the advanced guard truck stop and then signal to us. They had found the tracks of a ridden camel, apparently quite new. We examined it, and then, moving on a little farther, came to more and more tracks, and some dung still warm. There could be no doubt that a raiding party had crossed only a few minutes earlier.

We hastily rearranged ourselves, the two machine-gun trucks in front, then myself in the Buick and the Amir as rearguard, and drove off, following the tracks. The raiders were coming from Saudi Arabia and making northwards into Tubaiq towards Trans-Jordan. There seemed to be between twenty and thirty of them. What luck! Just the chance we wanted to try our new machine-guns and encourage our new soldiers without being too rash!

The raiders were apparently making for that line of great forbidding cliffs, now so close as to be almost overhanging us. Unfortunately the ground between us and the foot of the cliffs was becoming increasingly broken, with outcrops of rock and subsidiary cliffs fifty to a hundred feet high. Suddenly, round an angle of a rock, we caught sight of two camel riders a short distance ahead of us, flogging their camels along and looking apprehensively over their shoulders. Up went the "open fire!" signal flag—



tut-tut-tut-tut went the Lewis gun, and two bursts went after them before they vanished behind another spur.

We raced after them again, but they had turned up a narrow sandy valley between two cliffs. The leading truck stuck in the sand and blocked the way for the others. "Off you jump—riflemen climb the cliffs on either side and keep pace with us below—unship the Lewis gun and bring it along with us!" Everybody worked with frenzy, and with scarcely more than a few seconds' delay we were racing up the little ravine on foot. But the sand was ankle deep, and we panted along with the Lewis gun and spare magazines. Round another bend in the ravine, and a riding camel was standing fifty yards ahead. We paused. Was the rider lying somewhere behind a stone, ready to fire if we came nearer? We peered cautiously—no one in sight. We advanced holding our weapons ready, without seeing anyone, until we seized the camel. Still no sign of anyone. We scattered, searched the surrounding rocks and ran up the side valleys, but there was no one. It was only later that we heard that the raiding party had slipped away up a narrow path which climbed the main cliffs above us. We examined our captured camel, and in the saddle-bag discovered an account for goods supplied by a merchant in Ma'an, and giving the name of the owner of our captured camel. This paper identified the party as the Huwaiti raiders, whose camels we had seized in their absence. It was gratifying also to note, by counting their tracks, that they had no looted flocks with them. If they had brought back several flocks of plundered camels, they might have borne the loss of the animals which we had seized.

Everybody was in high spirits after this exhilarating little hunt. The troops had worked well, and were full of enthusiasm, and the Lewis gun had fired. We watered at a little rain pool, and after posting look-out men in case any other raiders were about, we sat down to make tea. The troops were bubbling with glee at the thought of what the raiders would say when they reached their homes, and found that all their camels had been seized by the Government in their absence.

When we returned to our camp, we received reports that the Huwaitat might raid us to take back the raiders' camels, or at

least attempt to steal some of them back at night. We spent two or three days of rather wearisome guarding, and were woken up several times every night by the sentries calling, "Al bil, ya ayyal! (The camels, boys, the camels!)" But nothing happened. A few days later an apologetic deputation of shaikhs arrived to intercede for the raiders, one of whom proved to be Awwadh ibn Hudeiba, our first Huwaiti recruit who had refused to number off. After looking grave for as long as our self-control lasted, we eventually winked at the solemn deputation, gave them back the camels, and told them to tell the Huwaitat not to be naughty, because next time we really would be angry. A large lunch of boiled mutton completed the proceedings.

The Saudi Frontier in the direction of the Wadi as Sirhan had been carefully picketed by parties of horsemen, but we had no outposts in Tubaiq to the south. The fact that our Huwaiti raiding party had gone out and returned through Tubaiq seemed to indicate that some pickets were required there also. I accordingly sent out a patrol of five camelmen, but this time they were drawn from my own soldiers, not hired tribesmen. They were to base themselves on a small water-hole at the top of the mountain, and to keep the paths across the range under observation.

After three days' journey across the desert and up into the mountains, they reached the water-hole. They reconnoitred it to make sure it was unoccupied, and then rode up to the well mouth, but found that there was very little water in it. They were obliged to lower one of their number down the well in order to bale the water into the waterskins. They were so absorbed in this occupation that they forgot to post a look-out man, although we had strongly impressed on them the necessity for caution.

Suddenly there was a burst of firing and the four men around the well mouth all fell. The fifth, at the bottom of the well, did not know what had happened. The enemy, who were raiders from Saudi Arabia coming to attack the Huwaitat, dashed forward, and murdered the wounded whom they saw lying around the mouth of the well. They then hauled up the fifth man from inside the well, and killed him.

But one of the four men who had fallen wounded was Hamdan

Al Biluwi, a small and ugly little boy, but one always at the point of the greatest danger and always managing to survive. His leg had been shattered by a bullet in the first volley, while another bullet had hit the mechanism of his rifle and broken it in half. But his wits were still wide awake, and before the raiders reached the well-mouth he had succeeded in dragging himself away a few yards and lying down out of sight behind a rock. For some time the raiders were busy killing the wounded, pulling up the man from the well and killing him, and examining the camels and equipment. But they then noticed that they had taken five saddled riding camels, but had killed only four men. They scattered to search for the survivor.

Hamdan, lying behind his rock a few yards away with a broken leg, could hear the enemy talking, saw them kill off his comrades, and then heard them discussing where he could be. Then he saw them scatter to search for and to kill him. One of them was walking directly towards the rock behind which he lay, and must inevitably find him, helpless and unarmed, grasping only the barrel of his shattered rifle. Then there would be a shout, a shot, and he would be dragged from his hiding-place along the ground to the open space by the well, and be finished off by having his throat cut by a dagger.

But Hamdan had been bred up to this kind of thing and was not dead yet. He crouched lower, and pushed the muzzle of his broken rifle round the corner of the rock. The man was advancing towards him with his rifle over his shoulder. When he had almost reached him, Hamdan pushed forward the muzzle of his rifle. "Stand still or I'll kill you!" he hissed. The man was taken by surprise and clutched his rifle, but Hamdan said quickly, "Don't move or shout, or I'll shoot you!" The man stood still, at a loss what to do. His comrades were some way off, and with that rifle muzzle so near his face, he did not dare to move or call out. "Take me under your protection and save my life, or I'll kill you," hissed Hamdan again. "You are under my protection," replied the raider, relieved to find so easy a solution. "Swear by Allah!" "I swear it by Allah!"

Hamdan threw away the broken piece of rifle barrel which had saved his life. "By Allah, were you unarmed?" enquired the

enemy. "Ay, by Allah, I was," said Hamdan with a little catch in his voice.

Meanwhile the other raiders had seen him and came running over with their weapons. "Slaughter the infidel!" they shouted, for they professed to be Wahhabis. But his former enemy stepped forward. "You can't kill this one," he said. "He is under my protection." "We will kill him, by Allah." "You will not!" "We will!" "By Allah, it shall not be!"

His protector stood his ground. At length the raiders relented. They gave him a drink of water, remounted their camels, and rode away, leading the five camels they had taken from the soldiers. Hamdan, with a broken leg, was left lying on the top of a mountain in Arabia—but his wit had saved his throat from being cut.

With the end of the winter, the tension on the frontier relaxed. Water in the desert became scarce and the Huwaitat began to move away to the westward. At the same time, the likelihood of Ikhwan raids was greatly reduced because lack of water made it difficult for large forces to raid across the desert in summer. The six months which I had spent in Trans-Jordan I had devoted entirely to the Huwaiti area, where the situation was most critical. In April, I moved to Azraq and made the acquaintance of the Beni Sakhr.

This tribe presented a contrast to the Huwaitat. The latter were poor and wild, but their mentality was simple and straightforward, and, like many southerners, they were great talkers and could rarely keep a secret. The Beni Sakhr were still almost entirely nomadic, like the Huwaitat, but their principal shaikhs had taken to agriculture twenty or thirty years previously, and were comparatively wealthy. Their estates were only ten or fifteen miles from the capital, Amman, and they were familiar with town life. Unlike the Huwaitat, the Beni Sakhr had a reputation for being sparing of their words, if not taciturn.

To prevent the Beni Sakhr from raiding gave us comparatively little trouble. To begin with, they had, of course, followed the progress of our operations with the Huwaitat, and knew what to expect. They were also in touch with Government policy in

Amman. Finally, they had suffered heavily from Ikhwan attacks in the early 1920's, but in the period immediately prior to my arrival they had been much less roughly handled than the Huwaitat.

It was remarkable after these first months how the great majority of both tribes, including all the shaikhs, completely abjured raiding, which became henceforward limited to a small number of persons, several of whom became repeated offenders. In the past everybody raided, and raiding was a custom not a crime. From now onwards, we developed in a mild way a criminal class. Believing that tribesmen hesitated to give information against their relatives if they would be imprisoned as a result, I inaugurated a new system. I declared publicly that any man who raided or stole a camel would have to give it back and would also pay one of his own as a fine to the Government. After that there would be no ill-feeling and the incident would be closed. This system possessed several advantages. It was a sporting idea, which appealed to the tribesmen, so that many informers hastened to give away the criminals. When this happened, we called upon the offender, and told him we knew all about him. If he attempted to deny, we rounded up six camels and told him that the two for one rule applied only to people who owned up. This usually forced a confession and resulted in the production of the stolen animals. We then took one for ourselves for each stolen animal, and finished up by making tea and discussing the whole affair with the criminals. This system abolished not only raiding but even ordinary stealing.

The men of the Desert Patrol were never done drinking tea or coffee, and we agreed with them that any man who broke a tea- or coffee-cup would be obliged to buy four for the mess. This arrangement produced much merriment and many jokes at the expense of anyone so unfortunate as to break a cup. Sometimes the troops held mock trials to decide who was responsible for a breakage. A whole body of law and precedent was built up round the cup-breaking fines—for example, should a man who volunteered to make tea for his comrades be fined if he broke a cup? There was also the question of cups broken by guests. Everybody was, of course, delighted if an officer broke one, and four replacements of the best quality were expected.

The Arab's sense of humour is never far away, and the system of camel fining appealed to their humour almost as much as the fining for broken crockery.

Although recruiting for the desert patrol had started slowly, with the Huwaitat strange and suspicious, it took us only a few weeks to recruit our ninety men. Very soon we had a long waiting list, and the sons of many of the leading shaikhs were struggling for admission. For the bedouin's chief pleasure in life is to bear arms, and the simultaneous abolition of raiding drove the most gallant and enterprising young men into the service. The uniform was cut in the same manner as their ordinary dress, long robes reaching almost to the ground and long white sleeves, but the outer garment was khaki in colour. With a red sash, a red revolver lanyard, a belt and bandolier full of ammunition, and a silver dagger in the belt, the effect was impressive. Soon the tribesmen were complaining that the prettiest girls would accept none but our soldiers for their lovers.

But the most remarkable thing about that first Desert Patrol was its spirit. The rural Arab has an extraordinary affinity with certain Englishmen, and a real affection soon bound the members of our little force together. For several years, I was not only the only Englishman but the only officer, with the sole exception of Ahid Bey Sukhn, who was responsible for pay and administration.

The discipline was very effective and punishments were rare. None of our men was ever guilty of serious misconduct. The most dreaded of all penalties was dismissal. Our small numbers and the intense competition to enlist enabled us to discharge any men who did not come absolutely up to our standard, and to pick better men to replace them, until we really had a *corps d'élite*.

Discipline with these boys was not a means of compulsion, for they revelled in the life and enjoyed every minute of it. They would spend a great part of the day training on their machine-guns, and after dinner in the evening they would argue with one another about the lessons of the day. Soon we started a reading and writing crusade, for almost all tribesmen were completely illiterate. Each evening the circle by the fire would be wrapt in a tense silence, while bearded faces bent forward, their long hair hanging

in plaits over their shoulders, and horny hands laboriously traced the letters of the Arabic alphabet in their copy-books.

But what we all most enjoyed were the long patrols across the desert in our trucks. We would set off across the great rolling plains in line ahead, with a two-hundred-yard interval between vehicles. We had our own technique for protection on the move, and whenever a halt occurred look-out men ran up to the tops of all surrounding hills. What laughter there was in practising the look-out men at running up a hill, then crawling the last few yards, and lying flat on the top of the rise with binoculars. Then crawling down the first few yards and racing down the rest.

Sometimes we would pass flocks of grazing camels, but now the herdsmen, instead of escaping up the nearest cliffs, would wave to us and call on us to stop. Sometimes we did so, and one of the troops would run over to the herdsmen with a bowl. Into it he would milk an old milch camel, and bring back a great basin of warm fragrant milk, which was passed round like a loving-cup from hand to hand.

At noon we would stop for lunch. The look-out men must first be posted all round, and then there was a shout of "Firewood, boys!" Some had axes, others spades and picks, and all scattered around hacking and hewing at the little desert shrubs. Each would come running back with a load, and soon the flames would shoot high from a huge bonfire. Meanwhile one of the party, on his knees on the ground and with his sleeves rolled up, was kneading a lump of dough as large as a football. The fire died down to a glowing furnace of red embers, the football was beaten out to a huge pancake, then deposited in the embers. Other hot ashes were pushed over it with a shovel, and lunch was in the oven.

Meanwhile strips of coloured mats have been laid out in a square, a small hole scooped in the ground in the middle, and a kettle and coffee-pots placed on the fire. Everyone would be laughing, shouting and running about on some job or other, except the sentries sitting on the vehicles, each of them behind a machine-gun and with his eye on the look-out men posted on the hills around.

When the bread was baked, it would be dug out of the fire,

looking like an enormous pancake coated with ashes. A few sharp blows, followed by a smart dusting, revealed the bread under its coat of dust and embers. It would then be broken into a big dish and mixed with oil. The whole party soon packed round the dish in a tight circle, munching too busily to have any time for talking. In a few minutes they rose, and some ran off to relieve the look-out men, who came in to eat. The rest of us sat in a circle round the tea and coffee fire, and laughter and talking began again over the tea-cups.

No sooner had the former look-out men finished eating, than the whistle blew, we swallowed the last cups of tea and coffee, the big dish was thrown into a truck, the relief look-out men came running in, and the leading truck drew out and headed across the rolling desert again.

Sometimes the monotony was relieved by the sight of tents, at which the patrol stopped, picked up the news, and drank coffee with the headman. Sometimes, in lonely country, it was the tracks of riding camels which the patrol stopped to examine. Every bedouin knows the elements of tracking, whether a camel is ridden or loose, how old the track is and, perhaps, by examination of the dung, the country from which the animal has come. Tracking experts will recognize the actual animal which left the track, if it belongs to their own tribe and if the soil is sandy and takes a clear impression. We know people by their faces because we are accustomed to looking at them, but trackers tell us that feet differ as much as faces, and that they can recognize people and animals by their tracks.

If the tracks found belonged to strangers, the patrol would swing off its course to follow them. We would proceed ready for action, running up each hill to look on ahead and to locate the party before they saw us.

Before sunset we would halt for the night. Sunset is a good time for seeing a great distance in the desert, and the patrol commander would lie on a hill-top with the look-out man until darkness fell, and then walk down to the camp, where the bread baking would be over, dinner ready and the kettle boiling. After dinner, the circle would close once again round the glowing embers of the coffee fire, and the talk and story-telling went on far into



the night. All about the tiny circle of men round the fire, the vast desert brooded in the immensity of silence.

By the beginning of May 1931, three months after the Desert Patrol took over, the situation on the Saudi frontier had become peaceful and undisturbed. Soon, however, we were faced with a new problem, which, although of only parochial importance, took longer to deal with than the international crisis with Saudi Arabia.

Immediately north of the Trans-Jordan frontier lay the Jebel Druze mountain block, an old volcanic area thickly strewn with boulders of black lava. This lava country extended not only into Trans-Jordan, but over into Saudi Arabia. The higher slopes of the Druze mountains caught the clouds from the Mediterranean, and rainfall was sufficient for cultivation, but the lower, southern slopes in Trans-Jordan were desert. The agricultural villages up on the mountain, all of which lay in Syria, were inhabited by Druzes, but the desert slopes were the camping ground of a number of small Arab tribes which were completely nomadic. These tribes were called collectively Ahl Al Jebel, or people of the mountain.

These tribes were peculiar and unlike any nomads I had seen before. Their camels were comparatively few, and most of their flocks consisted of goats or sheep. They were at enmity with all other tribes, and themselves never left the lava country. Should any other tribe be rash enough to camp or graze within a few miles of the edge of the lava, the mountain people descended upon them like flies on honey. Their raids extended over only a few miles. They gathered on the edge of the lava before sunset, charged out on horseback at an isolated flock of camels and raced back into the lava in the dusk. No tribe would venture to follow the raiders into the lava in the dark. Others after dark would sally out from the lava on foot, and creep into the camp of the enemy tribe, trying to steal a horse or camel.

The hands of the mountain people were against every man and every man's hand was against them. Their best friend was the lava. They acknowledged a loose suzerainty to the Druze leaders of the mountain, but they had never been controlled, nor had

any Government ever penetrated the lava. Half clad in rags and dirty sheep-skin cloaks, their long matted hair half covering their faces, their wild appearance offered a striking contrast to that of the Beni Sakhr shaikhs, who went beautifully dressed and perfumed.

As early as April 1931, we received a complaint from the Beni Sakhr of the depredations of the mountain people. A heavy thunderstorm had left pools of water near the edge of the lava, and on these pools the Beni Sakhr had camped. We went up with our four trucks to investigate. We found that great numbers of the Beni Sakhr camels were watering at these pools and grazing in the lava, where they were suffering considerable annoyance from the mountain thieves.

The problem was to me a new one. The foothills of the Druze mountain were so thickly strewn with rocks and boulders that it was exceedingly difficult to cross them on foot. To take vehicles into this area seemed unthinkable. Yet we had no alternative. The Beni Sakhr had appealed to us; it was our first appearance in that area, and to confess our impotence would have been disastrous. A camel force might have entered the lava, but as yet we had very few camels, and these we had left to keep an eye on the Huwaitat.

There was nothing for it but to clear ourselves a track. To do this with bedouin soldiers was not a very hopeful task, for the tribesmen were still imbued with the idea that fighting was the only fit task for a man. Manual labour they despised, and to clear a track through those rocks was going to be navvy work of the heaviest kind. But it had to be done.

So one morning we started off in our trucks for a patrol, and I steered for the lava. Pulling up my car, I got out and began to move a rock. One or two others came up to help, we took off our coats, others joined in, and the work had begun! We made half a mile the first day, clearing a track only nine feet wide, up which the trucks could just creep at three miles an hour.

The troops soon got interested, realized that we were making good, and found themselves working almost without knowing how. Soon we developed a regular technique. It was weary work, especially as we had to be constantly ready for attack. Two or

three men first went on ahead on foot and picketed the high ground. Then the rest of us worked ahead, digging, levering, rolling or carrying the rocks, so as to open the track. Immediately behind the workers came the trucks, each containing a machine-gun ready on its mounting and manned by one man. As fast as the track was cleared seven or eight yards ahead, the trucks closed up on the working party. Even so, every man worked with his rifle slung on his back.

Within ten days, we could take our trucks six miles into the lava, beyond the farthest grazing camels of the Beni Sakhr. The mountain people retired before us deeper into the lava and we never succeeded in making contact with them, but there were no more thefts from the Beni Sakhr.

With the approach of summer, the Beni Sakhr moved to the west of the railway and the immediate crisis passed, but the fact remained that there were 5,000 square miles of lava country inside Trans-Jordan which had never been penetrated by any Government.

The external relations of Syria were in the hands of the French, and there was little co-operation on the frontier. To begin with, neither the French nor the Trans-Jordan Government had complete control of their own tribes, and in such circumstances agreements concluded by the two Governments to put an end to raiding or to return looted animals were never carried out. Both sides tended to support their own tribes and believe their version of frontier incidents, which was usually hotly denied by the other side. Thus it was always difficult to reach an agreement as to the facts of alleged incidents, and even more so as to the amount of loot. But even if an agreement concerning the loot were reached and promises made that it would be returned, such promises were rarely if ever implemented. In any case, it was useless to return the loot of past raids while new incidents were constantly taking place.

I had little hope of being able to maintain order on the frontier by relying on the French, who were both bad co-operators and also unable to control the mountain people. But the great majority of these tribes camped during the winter months in Trans-Jordan in this impassable lava. I decided that the best course would be to

get in touch with these tribes ourselves, and deal with them direct and not through diplomatic channels. To do this meant that we must first penetrate the lava to their camping grounds.

We did a good deal of work clearing tracks during the summer and autumn. Most of the Jebel nomads retired in summer to the higher parts of the range inside Syrian territory, and the lava inside Trans-Jordan was deserted. In winter, however, the majority of them moved down the mountain into Trans-Jordan territory. Our idea was to move out before the tribes and to plant ourselves exactly on the line of their migration. I had about twenty-five men available for this task, and we were going to place ourselves in the path of many thousand tribesmen, in country where vehicles could move only down our very narrow tracks at the pace of men walking on foot. The force seemed inadequate, and I consequently arranged with the ever-willing R.A.F. for a section of their armoured cars to accompany us. We duly took up our position after some heavy work through a particularly dense field of lava, through which we moved literally yard by yard, levering enormous boulders out of the way with crowbars. But no sooner were we in position than the heavens were opened, and it rained and rained. Our camp was soon a river and all the vehicles, especially the armoured cars, were completely bogged. Fortunately there were plenty of bushes available to keep large fires going to warm and dry us. We lay thus bogged, and damped in spirits as well as in body, for five days, and no tribes appeared.

On the sixth day it stopped raining and we saw camelmen approaching. I had carefully schooled the men in the necessity of showing the most cordial welcome and genial hospitality to the first arrivals. We knew the first visitors would return to the tribes and be eagerly cross-questioned by all. The first arrivals were greeted with enthusiasm. "Welcome to the guests, a blessed hour has brought you," we called—and we hastened to unroll a very damp carpet, and to heap bushes on the fire. The leader of this party was Fahad Al Aweiyid of the Shurafat tribe, a man already known for courage and resource though not the shaikh of a tribe. A few years before, he had tried one night for several hours to steal a camel from the camp of Khalaf Al Mor, a Beni Sakhr

shaikh. Meeting with no success, he had stood behind Khalaf's tent in the dark and called out: "Confound you, Khalaf! Send me out a camel here. I cannot get anything from your camp!" The younger men seized their weapons and dashed out into the darkness, but there was no one to be found.

We entertained our guests as well as we could, being ourselves wet and cold and muddy, and four days later appeared the shaikh of the Shurafat, Mellooh ibn Aneizan, presumably encouraged by Fahad's report of his reception. To him also we behaved as hospitably as we could.

With affairs taking this favourable turn, we thanked the armoured cars for their support, and they returned, nothing loath, to Amman in time for Christmas. We moved from our muddy bivouac to Ashaqif, a ridge joining the craters of a number of old volcano cones. Here there came to us another Shurafat shaikh, Qasim ibn Sufaiyan, and Auda ibn Seroor, the most influential of the Jebel tribal shaikhs. Both gave us a solemn promise on oath to do all they could to put an end to raiding and stealing. Almost all the influential men in the nomad tribes of the lava had now called on us, and promised voluntarily to give up raiding and plunder.

An amusing and at the same time a useful incident occurred a week after the visit and oath of Auda ibn Seroor. We had been overtaken on the Ashaqif ridge by a bitter sleet- and snowstorm and a howling gale, and had moved farther east to a sheltered valley full of low bushes, between black hills strewn with lava rocks. On the east, these fields of desolate black rocks ended suddenly on a line drawn north and south, and were changed into the flat gravelly plain of the Hamad, on which not a rock was visible. The tribal boundary coincided with the change of country. The limit of the Jebel tribes was the edge of the lava, while the open plain belonged to the Ruwallah.

We were on patrol one evening before sunset near the edge of the lava and the plain, when we saw two horsemen just inside the lava. We took cover, and observed them hobble their horses and crawl to the top of a little hill which commanded a view eastwards over the plain. Soon afterwards, we saw a flock of camels grazing a few miles away.

We were in the dress circle for this little play. We watched the horsemen slowly crawl down from their observation point, remount their horses and ride forward out of the lava, and up a small valley which enabled them to get close to the grazing camels unseen. At this stage we also crawled down from our hill to the cars, and ourselves followed the horsemen. Again one of them dismounted, ran up the side of the dry water-course along which they had approached and peeped over the ridge above. His comrade below held both the horses. The nearest grazing camels were only a few hundred yards from the horsemen and the sun was about to set. The time had come for them to charge from their cover, round up the nearest four or five camels and race back to the shelter of the lava and darkness. But just as the two horsemen topped the last ridge ready to charge down on the flock, we topped the next rise behind them with three cars in line abreast. The two riders suddenly turned their heads, saw the cars between them and the friendly lava, gave up hope of the camels and rode back for their lives to the west. But the plain was open and gravelly, and we raced them. It was soon clear that we should head them off before they reached the lava, when suddenly they doubled on their tracks like hares and were galloping in the other direction. The trucks swung round on two wheels and raced back on the other tack. The horsemen were now riding as though they were coming up the straight at Epsom. Our soldiers, excited by the passion of the chase, were standing up in their trucks, their long hair flying in the wind, cheering the flying riders! After seven or eight minutes of mad galloping, the horses began to flag and the trucks drew in on them. We slowly came alongside, and headed them away from the lava and out eastwards into the open plains, which stretched 500 miles to the Euphrates. Before they could pull up, the troops were leaping from the trucks, had dragged them from their horses and stripped them of their weapons.

The raiders spent an uncomfortable night tied hand and foot with ropes with a sentry standing over them, and next day we took them back crestfallen to our camp. They came from the tribe of Audah ibn Seroor, whom we sent for at once. I asked him sternly what was the value of his oath, when we found his tribesmen raiding only a week later.

I had little doubt that Audah had meant what he said and that he was ignorant of this enterprise, but in spite of this we all looked very solemn and stern. It transpired that one of the offenders was his brother-in-law, whereat we all assumed even more pained expressions. After about an hour's torment, during which Audah swore a great many oaths that he was not aware of their enterprise, and begged with tears in his eyes that we spare them just this once, we apparently rather doubtfully agreed to let them go on the express condition that he gave a written guarantee that it would never happen again. The horses we said would be forfeit to the Government (but we gave them back also a few weeks later). I still have clearly in my mind's eye the picture of Shaikh Audah ibn Seroor on horseback, his back bowed by the extent of his responsibility (or by shame at the infamous conduct of his relatives!), picking his way down a narrow valley between two ridges of lava, with the two offenders walking on foot in front of his horse, their hands still tied behind their backs.

The humour of this pathetic scene lay in the fact that we were twenty-five men and the tribes around us were several thousands, that we were 125 miles from reinforcements and had no wireless or means of communication!

This incident ended our campaign against the People of the Mountain. Henceforward they were some of our dearest friends. Great numbers of them enlisted in the Arab Legion in the years which followed. For several years we continued to wear out our hands clearing tracks through the lava, until the whole area was covered with a network of these narrow lanes, but never again did we have any conflict with these wild tribes.

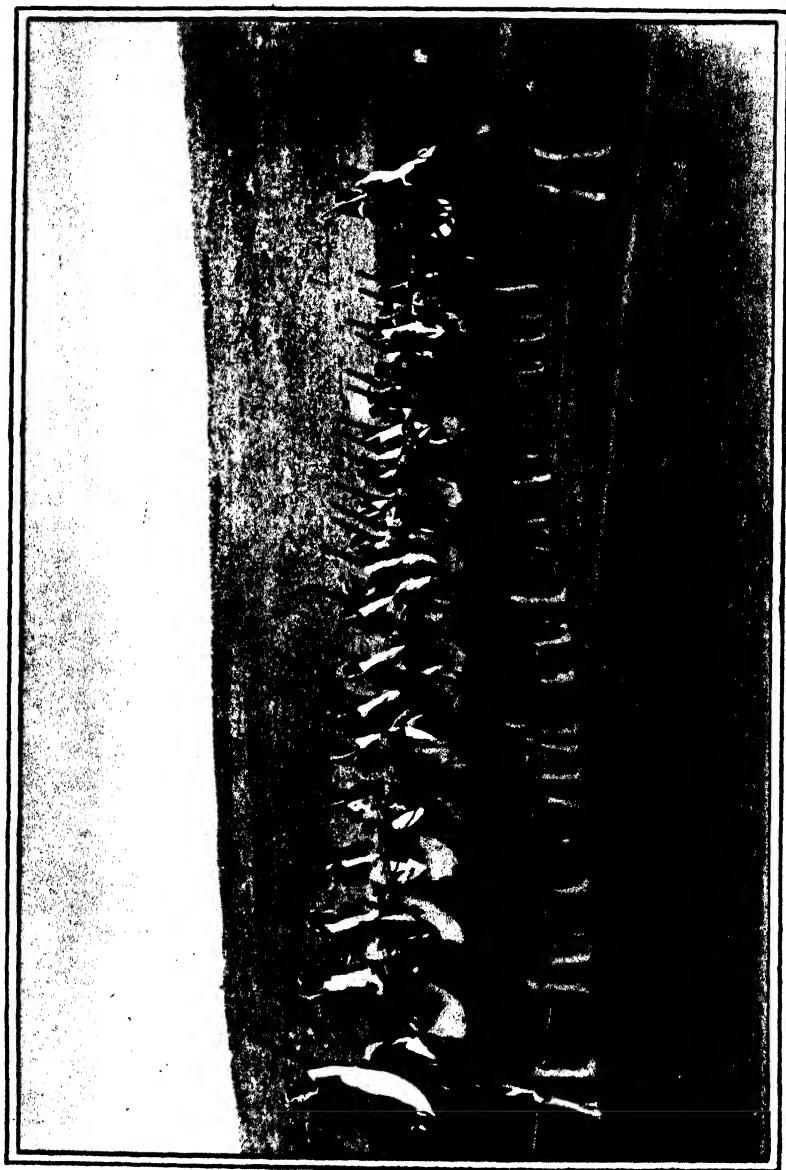
Our efforts in this area were extremely seasonable, for shortly afterwards work began on the Iraq Petroleum Company's pipeline from Iraq to Haifa, which passed through 100 miles of this lava country without so much as a single incident with these tribesmen.

The last raid affecting the Trans-Jordan tribes took place in July 1932, when raiders from Saudi Arabia looted several flocks of camels from the Huwaitat. The affair actually took place in Saudi Arabian territory, where the Huwaitat had gone for grazing.



A "two-seater" outside the Desert Patrol fort at Rum in 1934. In the saddle is Hamdan al Biluwi





Little credit can be claimed for putting an end to raiding, a task which every Government in Arabia had performed more or less efficiently. But in most Arab countries the change was carried out forcibly, after repression and imprisonment. In several countries it has since broken out spasmodically again and again, when conditions were disturbed or the authorities occupied elsewhere.

In Trans-Jordan raiding, which had been practised for centuries, was abolished in a few months without inflicting a single casualty on the tribes and without putting a single tribesman in prison. No subsequent attempt was ever made to revive it, even when the Government was deeply involved elsewhere in internal disturbances or in war. And finally these tribesmen, who had for centuries regarded the Government as their natural enemy, enlisted in their thousands in the Arab Legion, and have ever since been amongst the most loyal and patriotic of the citizens of Trans-Jordan. Most of the credit for this proud record must go to the members of that first little Desert Patrol of ninety men who, by their wisdom, their devotion to the cause in which they were engaged and their brotherly love for one another, so impressed the tribes by their example that they gave to tens of thousands of wild nomads a vision of a new kind of life. Thank you, brothers!



# VI

## *Arab Warfare*

“When all for praise, and proof of manly might,  
The martial brood accustomed to fight:  
Then honour was the meed of victory,  
And yet the vanquishèd had no despite.”

SPENSER: *The Faerie Queene.*



## ARAB WARFARE

**I**N the previous narrative the references to Arab wars and raids have been purely incidental to the narrative. I therefore hope that the reader will excuse me if I break off the narrative for the space of a chapter in order to give some description of the old Arab system of warfare.

Before describing the methods and standards of Arab warfare, it is important to define the difference between a chief and a ruler. The word "chief" I shall employ for the head of a tribe, a position in theory patriarchal; that is to say, that the tribe is essentially a family all descended from one ancestor, of whom the tribal chief is the eldest surviving descendant and thus head of the tribe by right of birth. When the tribe came into existence it was the only group known to its members, and was not controlled by a superior organization, such as a state, capable of enforcing any system of inheritance or primogeniture. Thus in practice the eldest son of the eldest branch of the family may not always have succeeded—some more energetic but junior member might occasionally usurp the leadership.

Every now and again, however, a single personality acquired the control of several tribes. Possibly he was the hereditary chief of one tribe and had conquered other tribes, as in the case of Ibn Rasheed. Arabia, moreover, is not populated solely by nomads, but is also dotted with oases and towns. He might be the non-tribal head of some oasis. Whatever was his origin, such an individual obviously ruled by a right quite different and distinct from that of the tribal chief. He was not a patriarch, the hereditary leader of his relatives; he was the political leader of a variety of different groups, many of which were not related to him by blood. In this chapter the tribal or patriarchal leader will be called a chief. The political controller of a number of tribes or oases will be referred to as a ruler or prince. Such were the Sauds, and the

Rasheeds, and the Sherifs of Mecca. Before the rise of the Sauds, Ibn Ar'air was ruler of Eastern Arabia. In lower Iraq, the Sadun family ruled a confederation of tribes known as the Muntifik.

Wars between rulers were essentially different from wars between tribes. A tribal chief was the hereditary head of his clan, such as existed in the Highlands of Scotland. Certain tribes were perpetually at feud with certain other tribes, but such tribes rarely aspired to exterminate, or even to dominate, one another. It might thus be said that their feuds had no political object. It was merely an inherited custom, and these feuds, carried on generation after generation, lent a spice to an otherwise dull existence and provided a field in which ambitious youth could gain distinction. It is perhaps not entirely illegitimate to compare such rivalries to the annual matches between Oxford and Cambridge. In degree, Arab tribal feuds were more intense, for many were killed on both sides, but they bore this resemblance—that each side respected the existence and indeed the equal status of the other, and that both types of contest provided an outlet for youthful energy and for man's thirst for glory.

Contests between rulers can be stated in political terms readily comprehensible to Europeans. The principal difficulty encountered by Arabian rulers in the past was lack of a regular revenue. It is true that they taxed their own tribes, usually by collecting a small sum of money on every sheep or camel. The inhabitants of the oases were similarly taxed on their gardens and cultivation. Sometimes they were able to raise some money on imports by a primitive customs system, especially if they happened to control a seaport. But the resulting revenue was small, and was further diminished by the prevalence of illiteracy, the primitive nature of the accounting system and absence of any form of budget or audit. The ruler's control over his subjects was so precarious that he was afraid to increase taxation for fear of provoking rebellion, and he was thus always on the look-out for sources of revenue other than the taxation of his own subjects. Such welcome assistance might come in the form of a subsidy from a foreign Government, perhaps from his suzerain the Sultan of Turkey. At times he might impose dues on passing caravans of merchandise, or on pilgrims going to Mecca. Some might derive

revenue from pearl fisheries in the Persian Gulf or, before the British Navy intervened, by piracy on the seas. Arab rulers in Iraq, Trans-Jordan or the other northern countries were better placed in this respect, because they might control comparatively fertile agricultural areas in addition to deserts.

The revenue thus collected by the Arab princes was chiefly expended on subsidies to their tribal chiefs. The ruler had not enough revenue to maintain a standing army, and thus his army consisted of the tribes, each tribal levy being under the command of its hereditary chief. Should one of those chiefs become dissatisfied and withdraw his allegiance, a division was lost from the ruler's army. If a rival ruler existed, the situation was even more serious. The defection of the tribe not only weakened the first prince's army, but the malcontents would probably be added to that of his opponent. The ruler was therefore constantly apprehensive of the defection of his tribes, and much of his money was spent on subsidies and gifts to the most important tribal leaders.

The importunities of the tribesmen were not confined to the important shaikhs. Innumerable smaller chiefs, heads of families, raiders, poets and others aspired also to enjoy the prince's liberality. Some of these received a regular allowance, in money, food, coffee, or clothing, or all four, while others resorted to the custom of "visiting." Once or twice a year, such persons mounted their camels and set out to visit their prince, accompanied by a larger or smaller retinue of their relatives or fellow tribesmen in proportion to their wealth and importance. The whole party had to be entertained for several days at the ruler's expense, and on leaving each would be given a cash present and a suit of clothes.

Thus a great Arab prince might entertain many hundred guests every night throughout the year, including his own retainers and hangers-on. The second great drain on the princely revenues was hospitality. Thus the slender revenues obtained by his primitive system of taxation were barely adequate to the payment of gifts and subsidies necessary to retain the loyalty of the tribes and to keep unlimited open house to all comers. What was left over was spent on the maintenance of the princely family and its retainers, and perhaps something in the nature of a body-guard, often consisting of negro slaves. This body was also sometimes used in



battle as a kind of "Old Guard," the last reserve to be thrown into the attack or to rally round the prince's person in defeat.

Having no regular army, the ruler was obliged to rely in war upon the tribes. If one tribe showed itself recalcitrant, he had no alternative but to call upon the other tribes to join him in a punitive expedition. He employed the same methods to extend his dominions by reducing fresh tribes to allegiance or by overthrowing a rival ruler.

This system produced in the tribes certain not altogether desirable characteristics. To the tribesman the only really basic and unchanging loyalty was that to his tribe. The rulers were often little more than war-lords who rose or fell in importance with each generation. The tribe was a community which went on for ever, because it was based on family relationship, not on the ups and downs of politics. These factors produced in the tribesman a mercenary attitude towards rulers, whom he tended to regard as fair game. Sometimes he extorted all he could from one under the threat of deserting him and joining a rival, sometimes he shamelessly played them off against one another. It is perhaps difficult to call these practices wholly immoral, for the loyalty of the tribesman was to the tribe just as the loyalty of the Briton is to his country. The relations of the tribe to rulers or to other tribes were the subject of negotiation and liable to change, just as are Britain's foreign relations.

The result, however, was to render it peculiarly difficult for rulers to survive, for they commanded no basic loyalty from the tribes and disposed of no regular army with which to coerce them. When two neighbouring rulers were engaged in rivalry, as was the case, for example, between Ibn Saud and Ibn Rasheed, intense political activity was carried on, each of the princes straining every nerve to seduce the tribes of his rival and to retain the loyalty of his own.

The military operations of a ruler might be of two kinds—a punitive expedition against an insurgent tribe or a set campaign and probably a pitched battle against a rival prince. In both cases, the first necessity was to summon the tribal contingents to a meeting-place on a given day. Most rulers also demanded contingents from the villagers and gardeners of the oases. As the

tribes took some time to collect and come to the rendezvous, surprise was difficult to achieve, unless the raid was on a very small scale. Every effort, however, was made to keep the objective secret, false rumours would be circulated so as to confuse the enemy, and the actual date of departure might be varied or delayed. It was good policy at times to arrange for warnings of impending attack to be sent to the real objective, several times in advance. The first two or three times, they would flee or take up a defensive position until at last they grew tired of false alarms, and neglected precautions when the real attack came. The difficulty of knowing when to "couch and hobble" the flocks was referred to in a previous chapter when discussing our own tribal defensive measures against the Ikhwan.

When the force actually set out, a number of reconnoitring parties were sent well on ahead to locate the enemy, and were given an advanced rendezvous at which they were to meet the main body again. The strength of these reconnaissance parties varied, of course, with the size of the main body, but might consist of some thirty camelmen, with perhaps half a dozen horses. Horses were never ridden on the march in the desert. They were led by a camel rider, who left his camel and mounted his mare when going into battle. While these reconnaissance parties were seeking out and locating the enemy, the main body advanced at a more leisurely pace. Desert armies had no transport organization, and every tribesman brought with him his own supplies in his saddle-bags; a fact which limited the operations to very short campaigns. No forage was carried for camels, and as a result the advance of the army was necessarily at a slow walk, the camels grazing as they went. In addition to this, however, a long halt before midday was required for grazing, and probably another before sunset.

The rendezvous with the reconnaissance parties would be timed for the day before the proposed attack, and at a distance of some fifty or sixty miles from the estimated position of the enemy. They would then meet the prince and report to him all that they had learnt of the enemy's dispositions. Surrounded by the tribal leaders and his own most trusted warriors, seated in a circle on the ground in the desert, the prince would hold a council

of war and then issue his orders. Before sunset the army would be on the move, led by members of the reconnaissance party. All night long they would travel, half trotting, half walking, the men nodding and waking in their saddles, the whole desert full of the soft padding and rustling of thousands of camels' feet, a sea of dark figures gliding along beneath the bright desert stars.

Soon after dawn the distant barking of dogs would tell the scouts that the camp was near. The prince's war-banner would be unfurled, the leaders would leave their camels and mount their horses, poising their long lances. The prince must judge when to let loose the charge. If too soon, the horses and camels would be tired before reaching the enemy. If he delayed too long, some portion of the army might blunder into the enemy before acquiring the momentum of the charge.

When he judged the time ready, the prince gave the signal, and a wild, screaming cataract of horsemen and camelmen poured in a raging torrent into the enemy's camp.

If the enemy were surprised, wild confusion ensued. The camel herdsmen would jump on the backs of the leaders of their flocks and calling to the other camels would try to stampede them away. Flocks of panic-stricken camels fell and stumbled over the tents until they swept into the open desert, in a charge scarcely less formidable than that of the prince's army. For tents and gear could easily be replaced if the flocks could be saved. Inside the camp confusion resulted. Some of the defenders who had succeeded in getting mounted would canter out with their long lances, and endeavour to check the charge or would skirmish on the flanks to gain time. If the majority of the camels had got away, the horsemen would probably abandon the camp and act as rear-guard to the escaping flocks.

A mad scramble took place in the camp, where the excited and victorious tribesmen had slipped from the backs of their camels, and were struggling wildly to seize carpets, clothing, dishes and even whole tents, and to load them on their camels. Meanwhile most of the horsemen and many camelmen were racing after the stampeding flocks, and endeavouring to head them off and drive them back.

Abdul Aziz ibn Rasheed, like Richard Cœur de Lion, prided

himself on charging with his men and on reaching the enemy at the head of his army. Thereby he voluntarily sacrificed all hope of exercising any tactical control of the battle once the charge was launched. Other princes made a practice of following the first charge, escorted by their slaves, retainers and body-guard, who at a pinch might be employed as a tactical reserve. It was, in any case, impossible in a dawn attack to hold back any of the tribal contingents, drunk as they would be with excitement and mad for loot.

Once the success of the charge was assured, the prince would dismount from his charger and slaves would hasten to unroll carpets to sit on. A hole would hastily be excavated in the sand, some would collect bundles of firewood, and soon a thin column of smoke rising into the still desert air would announce to the struggling masses in the field that the prince was taking coffee.

Soon the slaves and retainers would once more be busy, galloping their sweating mares to left and right. One-fifth of the loot was the property of the prince, but the wild tribesmen begrudged the payment of this due, and would hasten to load up a tent and some carpets, or drive away a couple of camels. They would then try to steal unperceived down a tributary valley and make their escape to their homes.

While the charge had swept over the camp and the looting had been going on, the women had been helpless spectators of the ruin of their fortunes, but had been personally unmolested by the enemy. If the tent of some important shaikh were present, the prince might well intervene to protect it and its inhabitants. When Ibn Rasheed conquered the camp of the Aneizah tribe at Jumaima in 1912, he posted guards over the tent of the shaikh of the tribe Ibn Hadhdhal, and eventually sent the shaikh's family and property to rejoin him under escort.

When the loot was collected for division and the separation of the prince's fifth commenced, a number of weeping women would stream from the camp, and appeal to the prince to give them back some of their property, which he would nearly always do. Then the army would perhaps rest for a day, bivouacking on the site of the battle. At last the prince's banner would be raised once more, the retainers, slaves and body-guard would mount their

camels, amid much shouting and roaring. The bedouins gradually faded away with their loot, and the prince's share of the plunder, divided into flocks under hired herdsmen, moved slowly away, grazing as they travelled. The campaign was over.

Such was a punitive raid by a bedouin ruler against an insurgent tribe. If his enemy happened to be a rival ruler of his own calibre, he was obliged to proceed with more care. The two armies, each preceded by their covering parties of horse- and camelmén, gradually approached one another, until they formed up in line of battle. On these occasions, some attempt would be made to organize the army. The prince with his war-banner and his retainers might take up his position in the centre of his battle line. The various tribal and oasis contingents would form up in order, the tribes Ateibah, Aneizah, Shammár, Ajmán and such oases forces as the people of Hail, Rass, Bureida, Aneizah or Riyadh. The various contingents formed groups, but their training did not go so far as forming into ranks or companies, or any other regular military formation.

Little use was made of artillery in these ancient battles, but occasionally a prince would bring two or three old guns with him, if the campaign were not far from his headquarters. The transport organization was inadequate to move artillery long distances across the desert.

As often as not, when the two armies were drawn up, hostilities would begin with single combats between rival horsemen between the lines. The tradition of challenges to single combat is many centuries old amongst the Semites—as witness David and Goliath. The bedouin planted his lance in the ground before his tent, as the sign of his noble birth. His taste for artistic decoration was lavished on the lance, which he decorated with ostrich feathers and bits of chain and metal. The Arab horseman used his lance "overarm," poised in his hand on a level with his shoulder, his elbow down and his forearm vertical, as we would throw a dart or a spear. The lance was long and supple, and quivered in his hand. In early days the shaikhs and richer horsemen also wore light armour—a helmet and a coat of chain-mail.

Thus arrayed, on a thoroughbred mare which he rode on a pad

without stirrups, the Arab knight would canter into the space between the armies, calling out his name and war-cry. Soon a challenger would emerge from the other army, and the two would engage and skirmish in the sight of both armies, each calling out their titles, the names of their sweethearts or sisters, and giving vent to shouts of defiance or bravado.

The main battle would, however, be fought dismounted, for the bulk of the armies were mounted on camels, animals too ungainly for close fighting. The camels would be couched and hobbled behind the line of battle, and the action would be fought out man to man on foot.

Campaigns between rival princes were never popular with nomadic tribesmen, for they involved on the one hand submission to a measure of discipline and on the other little chance of plunder. It was the raiding of tribe against tribe which was the Arab passion.

When two Arab rulers were on bad terms, each gave permission to his followers to raid the tribes subject to his enemy. At other times, a ruler might be too weak to prevent his own subjects from raiding each other, while often for long periods no capable ruler existed, and the tribes were able to enjoy a glorious all-against-all. Thus one way or another, a nomad tribe was rarely without tribal enemies on whom to show its prowess, or from whose flocks it could recruit its fortunes.

Important tribal chiefs were at times able to raise a sufficient force to carry out a "sobah," or dawn attack, over-running the whole camp of an enemy as was the common tactics of rulers. More common, and indeed unceasing year in and year out, was the ordinary raid, carried out by a raiding party which might consist of anything from three or four men to a hundred times as many.

During the day-time, the great flocks of camels are led out to graze, and wander several miles from the protection of the camp. This is the opportunity of the weaker raiding party. Moving cautiously through enemy country, following the beds of the valleys, crawling up every hill to peer out over the wide desert, the raiders see on a distant ridge those tiny specks, sometimes

moving apart, sometimes coming together, which the desert dweller so soon learns to recognize as a flock of grazing camels. The scout lies motionless, staring through his field-glasses. Can he see tents near the flocks, or are they defended by an escort of horsemen? Which way lies the best route of approach and the best line of retreat? Then he wriggles down from the crest and returns to his friends, waiting expectantly by the camels in the valley below. "Good news of loot!" he calls as he comes up to them.

The situation is quickly considered and plans concerted. The men who will drive the loot and those who will cover their escape have all been told off. The advance is resumed, following low ground from valley to valley. The leader once more climbs cautiously a near-by hill—and sees the grazing flock only a few hundred yards away. The raiders charge down at full speed; some round up the camels, others pursue the herdsman, who may at first resist, but seeing himself outnumbered will concentrate his efforts on escaping to raise his tribe. Meanwhile those detailed to drive the camels have packed them tightly together and are driving them away at full speed, while others skirmish behind them to cover the retreat.

If the tents are near and well provided with animals, horse and camelry may soon be pouring out of the camp in pursuit, and the rear-guard of the raiders will be hard pressed. Alternatively, if the tribesmen know the identity of the attackers and their home camp, they may not try an immediate pursuit, but prefer to set out on their camels with several days' supplies. Riding hard, they will pass the returning raiders, and dig themselves in on some well in front of them. After a week of riding without seeing any pursuers, the raiders will have become slack, and will move down to the well without sending out their scouts. Suddenly the leading camelmen will receive a volley of shots from the ambushed enemy, one or two will fall, the looted flocks will be driven back, and a long battle will develop. The thirsty raiders must needs drink at the well, but the owners of the looted camels are firing from trenches, inspired to increased obstinacy by the sight of their own plundered flocks.

It was mid-afternoon in a blazing day in June as we sat slackly

in Ibn Suweit's tent, leaning listlessly on camel saddles placed on the ground as elbow rests. The sides of the black tent had been taken down, so as to catch every breath of breeze, and we sat as though in the open air with a strip of black awning over our heads. I nodded sleepily in the oppressive afternoon heat, until I decided that to have a sleep and get it over would be better than this perpetual struggle to keep awake. I took up my cloak and walked out of the tent. The sand felt burning hot, the air shimmered with heat and the camp lay still and lifeless. In the open tents, figures lay asleep on the ground. A dog with his tongue out lay panting in the thin shade of a tall feathery *ghadha* bush. I waded wearily up a dune of loose sand, on the top of which a faint cool breeze met my face. I lay down in what shade was obtainable from a thin bush, over which I hung my cloak to keep the sun off my head, and closed my eyes.

I must have been nearly asleep, when I was suddenly startled by a number of rifle shots and a series of piercing screams. I jumped to my feet and ran to the highest point of the dune to look out. I could see nothing, but already the camp below me was alive. Snatching my cloak from the bush and suddenly wide awake, I ran down the soft side of the dune to Ibn Suweit's tent.

Everything was suddenly in confusion. Men were untying the head-ropes of their mares tied to the tent pegs and fumbling to unlock the chains which hobbled their fore-feet. Others ran out with saddles and rifles. Already a riding camel dashed past, ridden by two men, one behind the other, dressed only in their long white shirts. My chestnut stallion, Jaifni, was snorting with excitement, plunging round and round on the end of the rope by which he was picketed, and then stopping to listen, head up, ears pricked, tail in the air, looking the picture of the very monarch of Arab horses. With difficulty I got the saddle on his back without his trampling on my feet.

As we mounted, the great herds of camels came galloping back to the shelter of the tents, the ragged figures of the herd-boys clinging to the backs of the leading camels.

As we galloped away between the tents, girls and women ran out to us. They had shaken down their long hair over their shoulders, they drew open the neck of their smocks and showed



their breasts, they waved their arms to us and cried passionately: "The gallants! The gallants! On to them. This is the day! Where are our gallants?" Jaifni, thus exhorted, responded with a series of bucks, and it was all I could do to keep hold of his head at all and prevent his charging up a sand-dune or into a *ghadha* bush.

As we cleared the tents, we settled in our saddles, and I was able to look around at the rest of the field. In front of me, some seven or eight horsemen were galloping, their white "night-shirts" flying in the wind. Level with me on the right and some twenty yards away was a boy still in his teens, his long black hair carefully twisted in pigtails which flapped up and down as he galloped. His long legs and bare feet hung below his shirt. He was riding on a pad without stirrups, and with only a rope tied to the headstall of a shaggy old grey mare who must have seen better days. But whatever her age, her blood was up, her ears pricked and her tail in the air. Her rider was no less excited, and his face worked with passion as he stared into the desert ahead to catch his first glimpse of the enemy. All around us were men on camels, mostly two to one camel. As we galloped on, we gradually passed the camel riders, and about nine of us on horses settled down to a steady chase.

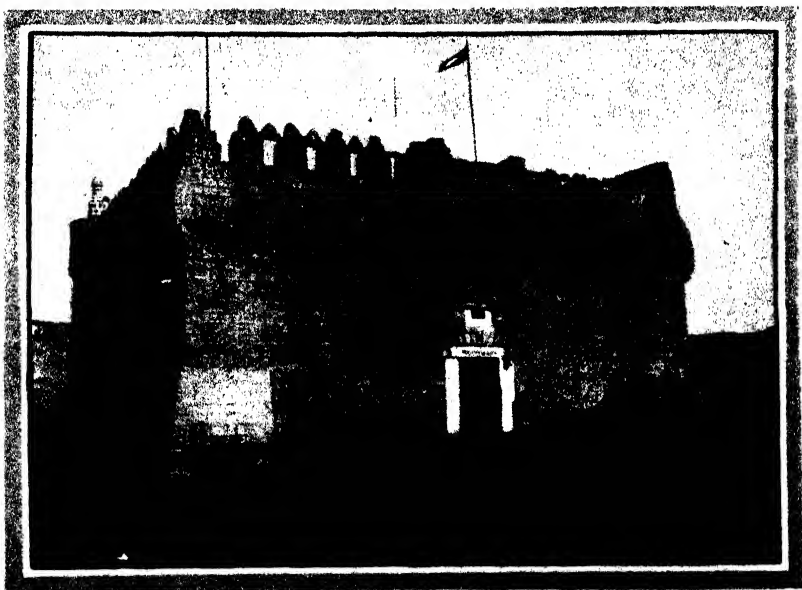
We had covered perhaps three miles from camp, when we topped a low sandy ridge, and there opened before us a vast open plain, fading away into the bluey-grey distance of the horizon almost without physical features. Just below the ridge we were crossing and perhaps a mile ahead was a large flock of camels, closely packed together, and travelling away from us at full speed, followed by a cloud of dust, and driven by about fifteen or twenty men on camels.

We galloped on steadily—Jaifni was bucking no more, his neck was covered with a white lather and the lightest of reins was now enough to handle him.

We were overtaking rapidly, when suddenly pft! pft! two bullets came over. About a dozen of the enemy's camelmen (each camel carried two riders) had pulled up, the pillion riders slipped off and, kneeling on the ground, fired back at us, then clambered up behind the saddles and dashed off again. We took a cautious pull at our horses and looked round to see what support was



My Arab stallion, Jaifni, the very monarch of  
Arab horses



The Desert Patrol fort at Mudawara



Frank Taylor

The men of the tribe gather in the Shaikh's tent

coming up behind us. The boy on the old grey mare had pulled up and was pushing a round into the chamber. His face was distorted with excitement, and he shouted: "I'm the brother of Joza!" as he fired rapidly at the enemy.

More horsemen overtook us, the camelmén were now topping the ridge behind us, and we galloped forward once more. Firing now became general. The raiders could be seen slipping from their camels, firing, and clambering back again as their camels trotted off.

The loosely scattered line of our horsemen alternately galloped on and pulled up and fired from the backs of their horses. Suddenly a cry made me turn my head just in time to see the boy and the old grey mare turn heels over head in a cloud of sand. The boy was on his feet again in an instant, but the mare struggled in vain, for her off foreleg swung broken and useless from above the knee. Her raiding and galloping days were done.

On my right front, the shaikh himself was galloping, his rifle in front of him across the saddle. As we drew nearer to the raiders, he checked his horse and waved his long white sleeve over his head. "Ya ahl al Jaish!" he shouted. "O camel riders! Surrender under the protection of Ibn Suweit! Your lives are guaranteed! O camel riders!" But more bullets whistled over as the sole reply.

We continued thus a few minutes more, galloping and firing, galloping and firing, when suddenly, and apparently without any concerted sign, we all kicked our horses, and the loose and wavering line raced forward in a wild charge. On my left a leggy old man with long white hair was waving a curved sabre. In front of me one horseman poised a long lance, but the rest of us were merely carrying our rifles. In a few seconds the race was over, I could not tell how, and I found myself in the centre of a wild mêlée, wrapped in dense dust beneath the burning sky. Our own people and the enemy camelmén were completely intermixed, and all round me half-naked and sweating Arabs, their faces distorted with frenzy, were striking, dragging, screaming and tugging in a deafening bedlam. At first it flashed across my mind that the enemy would all be killed. I looked round for the shaikh, and called to him not to let them be killed, but nobody took any notice of me. Pushed and jostled and bumped, I dragged the sweating

Jaifni out of the crowd and noise. Watching from the outside, I realized that there was no fear of a massacre. The defeated raiders were dragged roughly from their camels, their weapons wrenched from their hands, their cloaks torn from their backs. Two screaming bedouins were disputing the possession of one of the enemy's riding camels, others were dragging camels away by their head-ropes, a boy dodged out of the scrimmage with two rifles slung over his back, vaulted lightly on to his mare and rode back towards the camp. It was loot, not blood, for which the victors were seeking. I remounted Jaifni and rode back towards the tents, alone.

As I neared the camp, numbers of black-robed figures moved towards me out of the tents. A camelman, singing loudly, overtook me coming from the scene of the battle. As he came within hearing of the waiting women, he shouted in a stentorian voice: "Salimeen wa Kasibeen (Safe and with loot! Safe and with loot!)." The camel rider and I reached the crowd of women together. They pressed around us, all the excitement now vanished, their faces drawn with anxiety, eagerly questioning of the safety of their men. "Did you see my little boy?" called out an old woman plaintively. "Riding a grey mare—did you see my little boy?" I remembered the old grey mare struggling on the ground, and the excited shouts of the brother of Joza. "He is safe, auntie," I said; "I saw him!" She raised both her arms to the sky. "Praise be to God! Did you really see him? May God prolong your life! May God give you good news!" She turned and hobbled back towards the tents, repeating: "Praise be to God! O my Lord! Praise be to God!"

We dismounted again at the tent of Ibn Suweit, now quiet and almost deserted, except for the lame negro who made the coffee. The warriors came back slowly, in ones and twos. Ibn Suweit himself arrived, dragging two captured riding camels behind him. Dismounting, he called for carpets, brought out a heap of cushions, and told the old negro to make new coffee and tea. There was a bustle of preparation to receive guests. A few minutes later the enemy arrived, walking somewhat disconsolately and unarmed. "Peace be upon you," they said, stopping in front of the tent. "And on you peace," called the shaikh. "Be

so kind as to sit down! You have honoured us in a blessed hour!" Soon friends and enemies were drinking coffee together and discussing each incident in the fight, like bridge players arguing over their last hand. It suddenly occurred to me to paraphrase old Jorrocks. "Raiding, my beloved hearers," I said to myself, "is the sport of kings. The image of war without its guilt and only twenty-five per cent. of the danger!"

Smaller raids employed different tactics. Sometimes only two or three men set out across the desert on camels or even on foot. I have known at least one man who always raided alone. These small parties kept outside the grazing area of the flocks until the animals returned to the tents at sunset. After dark they approached the camp, and endeavoured to crawl in between the tents while the tribe was asleep. They chose a valuable-looking camel, or perhaps only a sheep, and endeavoured to drive it silently out of the camp. If the sleepers in the tents woke up or the dogs barked, the thieves had to abandon the attempt and slip away into the desert beyond the tents. They allowed an hour for the alarm to subside and then tried again. If the first night proved fruitless they moved away before dawn, lay up for the day in the desert some miles from the camp and tried again the next night.

Sometimes unsuccessful attempts continued for several days, until the food or water of the robbers was exhausted. To return home across the desert was no longer possible without replenishing supplies. After a last night of unsuccessful effort, the thieves at dawn walked into one of the tents and sat down. Intercepted before reaching the tent, they might be killed or stripped. But once in the tent, they were transformed into guests. The host would blow up the fire and produce the coffee-pots. The guests admitted that they had wasted three nights in vain attempts to rob their new host. "I thought the dogs were barking a lot last night," the host would remark, as he went to fetch another carpet to make his guests more comfortable.



# VII

## *Black Tents*

“I am black but comely, like the tents of Kedar.”

THE SONG OF SOLOMON.





## BLACK TENTS

**I**N the Ma'an and Kerak districts, the Biblical Edom and Moab, the majority of the inhabitants still live in black tents. These tents are made of goat hair, not camel hair as is sometimes supposed. The hair is locally woven into strips eighteen inches to two feet wide, and these strips are then stitched together by the women of the family to form the tent. The shape of the tent is that of a long parallelogram. To pitch it, it is laid flat on the ground and the pegs driven in and the ropes laid out all around it. Then the poles are inserted along the ridge-way. The result is a long, narrow strip of overhead awning. The ends and sides are closed with curtains, pinned on all round the eaves. The tent can be completely closed by hanging curtains all round from the eaves to the ground, or one side or the other can be left open to the coolness of the breeze or the warmth of the winter sun. The inside of the tent can be divided into separate rooms by other curtains hanging down from the roof. Nearly every tent is divided into two by a curtain in the middle, one half being used by the family, the other being left open for male guests.

The black Arab tent is doubtless thousands of years old. There are many Biblical references to it. Solomon, though he himself lived in a palace, was such an admirer of the black tents that he compared his love to them—black but comely like the tents of Kedar. The Israelites were obviously still principally tent dwellers in Solomon's day. He was the first to build a house for the Lord, the place of worship having hitherto been a tent. After Solomon's death, the rebels against his son Rehoboam cried out: "To your tents, O Israel!"

The Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus says that the Arab tents reminded him of a boat, turned keel upwards on the beach to be repaired or scraped, a simile the truth of which will be immediately recognized by any who have seen the black tents today.

With a history thus thousands of years old, it is not surprising that the tent has entered into Arab tradition. First of all it is a place of sanctuary, not only for the family but for all who are under their protection or who appeal for help. The bitterest enemy is safe if he can get into the tent or even catch hold of one of the ropes. "I am under the protection of this house," the murderer will call, as he throws himself into a tent, to elude his pursuers following him hot-foot. The owner of the tent will leap forward and place his body between pursuers and pursued, even though the latter be his own deadly enemy and the former his nearest relatives. The sanctity of the tent comes first. If the Englishman's house is his castle, the Arab tent is a sanctuary not only for himself but for all the world who may appeal to it.

A curious story of a tent is that of the "buwait" or the little house, a name bestowed on the tent of Ibn Suweit, the Shaikh of the Dhafir. (The Arabs apply the word "tent" to the white canvas shelters which we call by the same name. Their own black tents they call houses of hair.) The Suweit little house was famous as the scene of many wise decisions in tribal law and of many momentous conferences. To the Dhafir, it was enveloped with the sanctity of an ancient tradition. One year no rain had fallen in the Syrian desert, from the gardens of Damascus to the shores of the Persian Gulf, except in a single small valley almost in the centre of this vast barren waste. The tribes from every direction moved towards this one patch of grazing, and soon Ruwallah, Amarat, Dhafir and Shammar, all tribes at feud for centuries, found themselves camped within sight of one another. Each of the tribes was faced with the alternative of starving or of camping in this constricted area.

The situation was extremely precarious, and the presence of so many blood enemies so near to one another could scarcely fail to lead to fights, any one of which might bring in the tribes on either side and result in a bloody battle of mutual extermination. The chiefs concluded an armistice, and met together to discuss ways and means of enforcing it. It was agreed by all that there should be a temporary truce to all feuds and enmities, and what was more, that any truce breakers or persons who started a fight should be handed over. None should give them sanctuary or



MAWAB SALAR JUNG BAHADUR

Frank Hurley

The farmers of Kerak still live in tents



Camel Patrol about to set out



"Sphinx"

The camel has acquired a romantic aura



A poem sung to the accompaniment of an Arab violin

*Frank Hurley*

protect them from retribution. All the shaikhs swore to observe the agreement—the place is still to this day called the Valley of Oaths.

A few days later a brawl between members of different tribes took place at the water-pools. There were high words, abuse, a shout, a swift stab, and one of the disputants crumpled up and fell forward on his face. The murderer dashed away pursued by the bystanders—dodging right and left like a hare which has jumped up in the midst of a pack of hounds. A breathless few seconds and he had thrown himself on the carpet spread in the tent of the son of Suweit, and clasping the tent pole was screaming: "I am under the protection of this house." The Suweits were on their feet in an instant, and sword in hand closed the approach to the tent in the face of the pursuers. The Dhafir rushed to arms to support their shaikh—the murderer was safe.

The shaikhs of the other tribes sent to Ibn Suweit to protest. "Did we not swear not to give sanctuary to murderers and brawlers?" "The little house for untold generations has never failed to save all who appealed to it for sanctuary," replied Ibn Suweit. "But you swore an oath not to give sanctuary," protested the other chiefs reasonably enough. "But the little house didn't swear the oath—al buwait ma hadher al 'ahd."

The tent appears often to be regarded by the Arabs as having rights of its own, almost independent of its owner. I remember a long dispute between tribesmen, which originated from a blow struck. Two men engaged in an argument in a tent, both of them guests. The owner of the tent was not involved. Eventually high words were exchanged, and one of the disputants struck the other with his hand. The ensuing lawsuit, however, was not brought by the man who had been hit, but by the owner of the tent. Part of the compensation awarded by the tribal judge was that the offender should cover the whole tent with white cloth. The whitening of the tent was symbolical. It was intended to signify that the stain on the honour of the tent was washed away.

The simile of whiteness and blackness is very much used by the Arabs. Tribesmen take great pride in remembering a past favour, and in repaying their benefactor by similar kindnesses when



occasion offers. One of the methods of publicly acknowledging gratitude is the picturesque process of "whitening." It was shortly after my arrival in Trans-Jordan in the spring of 1931 that I first witnessed this practice. A man of the Sherarat had been arrested and imprisoned in Amman, on a criminal charge of some kind. When I enquired into the matter, it was obvious that he was not the right man. His name was Khalaf ibn Sobbah, the name of the wanted man, but he was of the Sherarat. The absconded criminal belonged to the Huwaitat. I persuaded the police of their error and secured the man's release.

A few days later I was visiting a large encampment in the desert. The tents were crowded, and all the shaikhs collected together, because the annual camel count for taxation was in progress.

I noticed a curious-looking figure moving slowly through the camp between the lines of tents. He was dressed only in a long white cotton shirt, with a white kerchief over his head. He was riding a camel which was entirely draped in white cloth down to its knees. In his hand, the rider carried a lance surmounted by a white flag. A small boy walked in front, leading the camel by a rope. As the white camel and rider moved slowly down the rows of tents, the man kept repeating a long drawling refrain, the words of which I could not catch. I soon realized, however, that I was in some manner involved in the affair, for I found that those around me were looking at me and smiling. The white-clad rider was no other than Khalaf ibn Sobbah, the Sherari whose release I had secured from prison. He was profiting by this tribal gathering to make public profession of his gratitude. As he rode, he repeated again and again in a high monotonous voice:

"Bayyidh Allah wajh az Zac-ee-eeem!

Bayyidh Allah wajh az Zac-ee-eeem!"

("Allah whiten the face of the Colonel!

Allah whiten the face of the Colonel!")

There are two things which the desert traveller or raider learns to recognize in the mists of the blue distance—black tents and camels. These things mean to the traveller hospitality, shelter, food and company instead of another night of half-sleep with one eye open, in the open waste with the headrope of his

riding camel tied to his wrist. To the raider, they mean battle and loot, or death or humiliation—the arrival of the moment of crisis.

Flocks of camels are perhaps easier to recognize than tents, because they move. First seen as a few tiny specks which might be anything, they can be recognized in time as grazing camels by the attentive observer, because they will be seen to get nearer to one another, farther apart, to coalesce into one and to split again into separate dots. A black tent is motionless, and is thus difficult to distinguish from a large bush at a distance of several miles. But a bedouin who knows the desert well will remember all the bushes for hundreds of miles for this very purpose, and gazing intently at a couple of tiny black specks dancing in the mirage several miles away, he will announce decisively: "Houses! There are no bushes in that valley."

How often, in early days, have I leaned wearily on the front of my camel saddle, with aching back after days of riding and dreary nights without light or fire, and with only a cold piece of Arab bread for dinner for fear that the lighting of a fire might bring raiders. Then suddenly I have seen the look-out man come racing down from the top of the hillock where he had been in observation, shouting: "Good news! A host for the night! I have seen houses!"

It would be a mistake to think that the tent is peculiar to the nomad alone. Many farmers who cultivate their own lands live in tents. This may be partly due to the tradition of thousands of years, but it is also in a great measure a matter of health and convenience. A well-built stone or brick house, with drains and municipal water-supply, is obviously the ideal dwelling. But poor peasants cannot as yet obtain such amenities, and tents have many advantages over the poor village, consisting of mud hovels, infested with fleas and without drains. When the vicinity of his tent becomes fouled, the tent-dwelling agriculturist can move a couple of hundred yards in one direction or another, and find himself again on virgin soil. Without a refrigerator in summer or any method of heating in winter except a fire of sticks, he can move his tent. In summer, he pitches it on top of a hillock open to every cooling breeze from whatever direction it may blow. In winter, he chooses a bend in a narrow valley, sheltered all round

by hills, and clothed in bushes and undergrowth which keep him supplied with firewood. The two camp sites may be only a few hundred yards apart, and both within the boundaries of the farmer's own land.

In many villages where the people live in stone or mud cottages, the black tents are still kept in reserve. In the spring-time, when grazing is obtainable at a distance from the village, some members of the family will take the sheep, load up the tent on a donkey, and go off for a month or so to camp out with the flocks. This was what Joseph's brethren did when they camped at Dothan, while Jacob stayed behind on the farm. Thus, also, the Bethlehem shepherds who were watching their flocks at night in the fields some way from the village, when the glory of the Lord shone round about them.

In this way, the farmers of Kerak and Ma'an still to a considerable extent live in tents. Particularly is this so of the Mujali, the leading family of the Kerak district, who still spend the summer in their camps of black tents, although they have not been nomadic for centuries.

The fact that the Arab faculty for noble and dramatic gestures still survives is shown by a pleasant tent anecdote, which occurred only a few years ago in Kerak. The hero of the story, Muhamad al Munaizil, is still alive and by no means an old man. He has today four young sons, all of them soldiers in the Arab Legion.

About twenty years ago, just before the abolition of bedouin raiding, a strong war party in the desert attacked the camp of Rithaan ibn Dhiyab, a shaikh of the Huwaitat. The enemy not only drove off his flocks, but rolled up his tent, and loaded all his possessions—dishes, bedding, carpets and food—on their camels. Rithaan ibn Dhiyab, with his wife and children, emerged from the encounter possessing only the clothes they stood up in. The neighbours lent him two camels on which to transport himself and his family to the settled area, where they would become squatters until fortune provided them once more with a tent and animals.

In this condition, Rithaan ibn Dhiyab and his women and children arrived as destitute refugees, and their luck brought them first of all to the black tent of Muhamad al Munaizil, a farmer of the Kerak district, where they dismounted as guests.

Rithaan told the story of his disaster to his host. When the sad tale was over, Muhamad disappeared behind the curtain for a whispered consultation with his own women. Then returning to the glow of the guest fire, he told Rithaan that no guest had ever come to his tent in distress who had not left consoled. He therefore begged his guest to accept the tent and all it contained. Muhamad al Munaizil, the farmer of Kerak, walked out of his own tent with his women and children, leaving the guest fire burning and dinner in the pot. The carpets were spread, the bedding was laid out, pots, pans, dishes—he took nothing with him. Muhamad al Munaizil and his wives walked away into the winter night, with the clothes they stood up in and the happy knowledge that they had saved another family from despair.

Could such a thing happen to any race but the Arabs?

I experienced myself the respect which the Arabs feel for the protection of a tent. It was in my Iraq days, in the autumn of 1929. The Ikhwan were in rebellion against Ibn Saud, and had retired to the Iraq frontier pursued by the King's Army. Both forces were drawn up immediately south of the frontier. I had been sent by the Iraq Government, with less than a hundred men, to prevent the forces of either side from infringing the neutrality of the Iraq frontier. The task was no sinecure, for the Royal Army was reported to be eight thousand strong, while the rebel forces were estimated at five or six thousand. I was one hundred and twenty miles out in the desert, and the nearest reinforcements were about one hundred and fifty miles away.

In this somewhat precarious situation, I was woken up at dawn to be told that a refugee had entered one of the tents. He proved to be a man called Abu Shijra, of the Ajman tribe, a Saudi subject. I found him embracing the tent pole in one of the men's tents. When he saw me, he called out in a loud voice: "I am under the protection of this tent and of the people of this tent." Enquiries revealed that he had been a member of the rebel army. He regarded the defeat of his comrades as inevitable, and having given Ibn Saud especial reasons for anger, he despaired of obtaining pardon for himself from the King. He had accordingly deserted his friends during the night and crossed the frontier. At dawn he had thrown himself into our tent.

The situation was extremely awkward for me. Before embarking on this campaign, Ibn Saud had specifically approached both the British and Iraq Governments on this very subject. He had explained that he foresaw that the rebels would seek asylum in Iraq if defeated by the Royal Army. He requested definite pledges from both Governments that the fugitive rebels would not be allowed to cross the Iraq frontier. Both Iraq and Great Britain undertook not to give sanctuary to the rebels. It was, indeed, to enforce this pledge that I had been sent to the frontier. And now here was one of the worst of the rebels embracing the pole of the tent!

My own men were indignant at the idea of handing over the fugitive to Ibn Saud. There seemed little doubt that his head would have been cut off. I eventually tried for a compromise, and told the man to disappear. I hoped we should hear no more of the matter. A few hours later, two large saloon cars pulled up outside my tent. In them sat a number of negro slaves, dressed in gay colours and covered with weapons. It was an emissary from Ibn Saud.

The messenger did not beat about the bush. He informed me that an infamous criminal called Abu Shijra was known to be in my camp. He reminded me that my Government had pledged itself not to give refuge to the rebels, and requested that Abu Shijra be handed over to him forthwith to take back in his car. I prevaricated and hedged, and promised to look into the matter. At last I persuaded the messenger and his escort to go.

The respite was a short one. The same afternoon they were back again with a more peremptory message. The messenger brushed all my excuses aside. I determined on a desperate throw. "Abu Shijra is in my camp," I said. "He threw himself into one of our tents this morning and placed himself under our protection. I did not want him to come and his presence is extremely embarrassing. But I am sure that the King will appreciate the difficulty of handing back a man who has begged our protection. I learned these customs from the Arabs. I did not bring them to you from England. Please tell the King that I ask him for the right that any Arab would claim."

The messenger left. That was the last I ever heard of Abu

Shijra. The negotiations regarding the rebel fugitives dragged on between the Governments concerned for nearly a year. Ibn Saud insisted on the fulfilment of the pledges which he had received. The protection I had afforded to Abu Shijra was contrary to the undertakings given by the Government I was serving. If the King had reported the affair to my Government, I should have received a severe reprimand and been ordered to hand over Abu Shijra forthwith. I found on that as on many other occasions the wisdom of appealing to Arab generosity, rather than endeavouring to overcome their resistance.

Life in a black tent in the desert is often extremely arduous to any but a bedouin. It can be pleasant enough in the early spring on a fine morning. The tent will be newly pitched on fresh sandy soil, the blue sky lightly flecked with white clouds. The distant ridges of the desert will be misty blue in the gentle sunshine, while in the foreground is a green valley carpeted with flowers, on which graze flocks of camels and sheep. The whole scene has an Arcadian air of pastoral peace. At night the valley will be lit by the pale white light of the moon, and the air will be full of the sweet damp smell of grass and flowers. Sometimes in spring the flocks graze by moonlight also, and the stillness of the cool desert air will be broken by the low sound of munching and the occasional rustle of a flock of sheep moving through the grass.

But there is an Arab proverb: "Not every night is full moon in spring-time." Sometimes life in the tent is far from idyllic. When a winter gale howls across the great steppes, the heavy hair tent flaps up and down wildly all night, making sleep impossible. Sometimes a particularly violent gust will raise up the whole tent and cause one of the poles to fall, perhaps on some unlucky sleeper. Sometimes a tent-peg will pull up, and the tent will belly out like a sail or even collapse on the occupants. They struggle out in wind and dark and driving rain, trying to drive the pegs in once more and pull up the ropes.

Sometimes, on a summer noon, a tall spiral dust devil will be speeding across the open desert towards the tent. It seems usually to come during meals. There will be a sudden call of "Al beit, ya ayyal! (The house, lads! The house!)" The men leap up and

grasp each a tent pole. For two or three minutes, they are in a blinding whirl of sand and grit. The tent flaps wildly, and then it is gone, and the pillar of dust is spinning away once more across the plain. The lunch is covered with grit and sand, and is scarcely fit to eat any more.

The tent is at its worst on a day of dust-storm. Then the poles are set at an angle to face the storm, and the tent acts rather as an inefficient wind-break than as a roof. The dust drifts in clouds through the tent and whirls back in eddies round the corners. To open the eyes is painful, for the sharp particles of sand soon make them smart. To eat or drink is impossible. There is nothing to be done but to crouch on the floor in silent misery.

Before closing this chapter on tents, I cannot resist quoting some lines from a little poem composed by Maysun al Kelbiya, the wife of Yezid ibn Muawiya, the second Khalif of Damascus (A.D. 680). Yezid lived in a palace surrounded by luxury, magnificently clad, and himself fat and indulgent. He married a bedouin girl, brought in from a tent in the desert. Life in a palace is much more comfortable than in a tent, but the life is more than meat and the body more than raiment.

Here is Professor Nicholson's translation of three verses of Maysun's poem (the "lubbard fat" is the lady's husband, the Khalif Yezid):

*"A tent with rustling breezes cool  
Delights me more than palace high,  
And more the cloak of simple wool  
Than robes in which I learned to sigh.*

*"The crust I ate beside my tent  
Was more than this fine bread to me;  
The wind's voice where the hill path went  
Was more than tambourine can be.*

*"And more than purr of friendly cat  
I love the watchdog's bark to hear;  
And more than any lubbard fat  
I love a bedouin cavalier."*

# VIII

## *The Code of Chivalry*

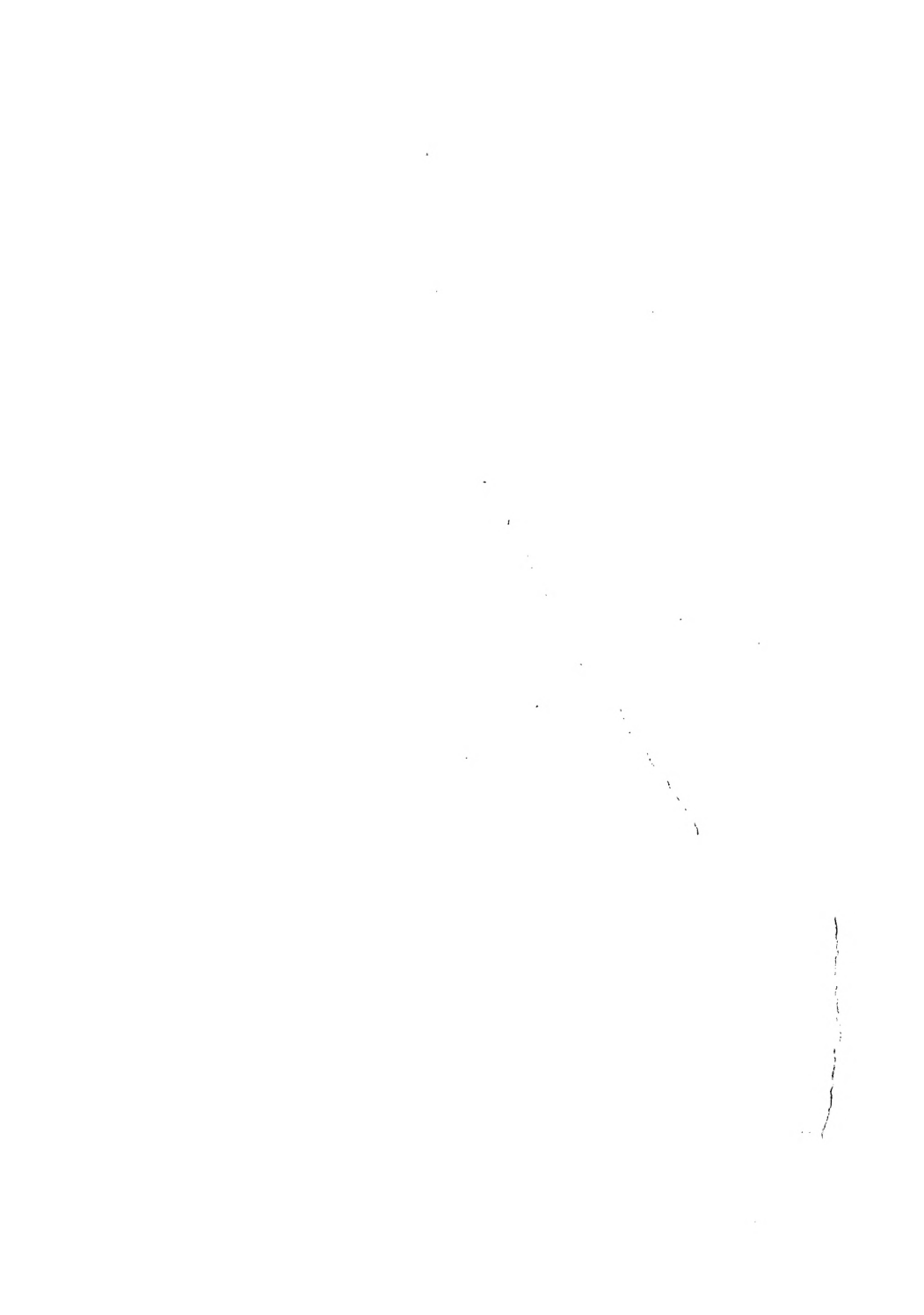
“Coveting the property of others, yet lavish with his own.”

SALLUST.

“A nation of gallant men . . . and of cavaliers.”

EDMUND BURKE.





## THE CODE OF CHIVALRY

**N**OWADAYS most of us have our ideologies, and each proclaims his own system to be the only road of salvation for mankind. In Britain, the majority believe democracy to be the panacea for human troubles, and we are gratified to hear that it has been established in Timbuktu, St. Helena or the Kuria Maria Islands. Few voices are raised, at least in public, to suggest that different countries and varying conditions may produce in one area a system which is quite unsuitable in another.

When we speak of democracy, we mean that the will of the majority, ascertained by a system of voting, shall have the right to impose itself on the minority. Moreover, the will of the majority is applied only at intervals of several years to select a party. There is no machinery for applying its will to individual problems. Subject to this right to vote at intervals of every few years, the British citizen is obliged to submit to many regulations, laws and decisions of which he may not individually approve.

The successful implementation of such a system requires in the public a considerable degree of self-control and public spirit. Communities living lives of danger in wide-open spaces tend to produce an extreme form of individualism, which resigns itself unwillingly to the imposed will of the majority. It is cities which have produced the group-consciousness which has made democratic representative systems possible. Britain may well claim to have introduced the Arabs to democracy—but not to freedom. Indeed, they were individually freer under the Turks, not because the Turkish Empire wished to support freedom. It did not—it desired autocracy, but it was too weak to enforce it.

The bedouin, if not from the day of his birth at least from a very early age, is obliged to fend for himself. At five or six years old, he may be sent out in charge of a flock of goats. Boys who in England would be in preparatory schools set out alone to ride hundreds of

miles across the desert, facing death from thirst or tribal enemies. Such experiences cannot fail to produce in them a degree of initiative and self-reliance which can be bred in crowded England only with difficulty. Bedouins, on the other hand, do not learn cricket, they rarely act in crowds or are taught team-work. The bedouin warrior is primarily an individualist, and often seems to us to be a boaster. He is more interested in himself than in his side. But he also lives very near to the ground, and death is constantly before his eyes. He has none of civilization's subterfuges to cover up the agony and crudity of life. Most of his children die in his arms, and he carries the little bodies into the desert himself and scoops their graves. The wounds which he receives in war turn gangrenous and he dies slowly of evil-smelling, hideous sores. His wife coughs to death with consumption in the middle of the family in his tent.

Add to this that wealth, were he to acquire it, would be of little value to him, for luxuries are automatically limited by the nomad life. If he attempted to add indefinitely to his flocks, all would be only the more exposed to enemy raiders. The story of Job was an everyday occurrence in Arabia. This uncertainty of wealth and constant contact with death made the nomad a philosopher. "Don't put the cups in the dust," I heard a tribal shaikh say to an old negro slave who was making coffee. "We all came from the dust and are soon going to the dust, so why not the cups?" the old man answered, continuing to roast the coffee beans over the embers. "Worldly wealth is like dirt on your hands—it comes and goes every day," is a bedouin saying.

When we say that the bedouin is self-seeking, we do not mean that he is calculating how to build up a fortune. Such an idea scarcely enters his head. It is true that he will rob a traveller and tear his clothes from his back, but this is rather as a child will snatch a toy that has caught his eye. The bedouin robber will celebrate his success by inviting his friends to a meal which will cost him more than the loot he captured. But his passion is glory—his own personal glory. Such being his ambition, he will admire the romantic heroes of Arab history and legend and the great raiders of his own day and tribe. But he will be bitterly jealous of his rivals and contemporaries, who may outshine him in prowess.

The keys of his character are thirst for praise and pre-eminence, hero worship, boasting and jealousy of rivals. Poets and women are the arbiters in the contest for glory, and wandering poets can always win distinction and rewards by celebrating in their ballads the deeds of chiefs and warriors.

A life of danger and vicissitudes in great open countries will, perhaps, always produce an heroic culture of this type. The days of the pioneers of the western frontier in America, with their great sheriffs and gunmen ("sherifs," incidentally, is an Arab word), bore many likenesses to Arab desert life, including the same tendency to boasting which often strikes the domestic and group-conscious British as being in bad taste.

War had no such terrors for the bedouin as it has for the modern city dweller. To begin with, it was largely controlled by rules. Then, also, the bedouin's wealth was all mobile, so that if he were threatened by too strong an enemy he could strike his camp and slip away to some other country, where he would be beyond the reach of the enemy or the tyrant.

Men who own houses or land regard war with horror and dread. If it comes, they must choose between a desperate resistance or a servile submissiveness in the hope that the conqueror will permit them to retain their possessions in return for submission or tribute. Not so the bedouin. War is his favourite occupation. If out-numbered, he will ride to meet his too-powerful rival and seek to out-manceuvre him by the use of his wits. When occasion offers, he will slip away, travelling day and night, regardless of food, drink or sleep, until he once more feels himself a free man.

Divided by such marked characteristics from the world of town dwellers, the bedouins considered themselves as the *élite* of the human race. They referred to one another as "thorough-breds"—the same word as they used for their horses. It was this strong feeling that they alone were gentlemen, which caused them to observe so many rules of honour in fighting one another. Most of their code of chivalry was abandoned when they fought against other communities.

Their attitude towards women reveals a number of contradictions. Perhaps some of the more anomalous features of their conduct towards women may be due to the fact that in early days

two types of women existed—the free daughters of the tribe, and the servants or slaves captured in war. The habit of taking Arab women captive in war has ceased centuries ago, but contradictory features in the treatment of women persist. On the one hand, free and romantic courtship remains the ideal, and there are still remnants of the old custom under which widows and divorced women had their own tents and themselves received suitors. Bedouin poetry and legend are full of tales of romantic love worthy of Arthur and the Round Table. Simultaneously, however, there are constant traces of the feeling that women are servants and inferior to man.

Overlying these two contradictory conceptions, Muslim religious ideas have been slowly gaining ground in recent years, for although Islam is 1,300 years old, and the bedouins were the raw material of its inception, the desert tribes have adhered to many of their old pagan customs to this day. Finally, it must always be appreciated that relations between men and women are to a large extent controlled—not by law, custom or religion, but by human nature. When we have studied all the history, the folk-lore and the religious precepts of the Arabs, we find to our surprise that, inside the bedouin tent, the relations of man and wife are more like those of Mr. and Mrs. Smith of Tooting than we had visualized.

The A'amriya was one of the most picturesque of bedouin customs. Girls carried on camels in gaily caparisoned litters were led into battle in the midst of their tribal contingents. In the heat of the struggle, each girl stood up in her litter, tore open her smock to show her breasts, let fall her long black hair, recited the heroic ballads of the tribe or called to the individual warriors by name in praise or reproof.

Several generations ago, Sultan Ibn Suweit was Shaikh of the Dhafir tribe in the desert west of the head of the Persian Gulf. His reputation as a raider and a hero covered Arabia. One day, 600 miles away, a girl riding a camel was molested and robbed on the shores of the Red Sea. Protesting against such ungallant treatment, she called aloud: "Oh, that Sultan Ibn Suweit were here to protect a helpless girl!" Months later, a passing traveller repeated the anecdote in the tents of the Dhafir. The shaikh was

among the listeners, and swore that he would recover her rights though he had not been there to prevent the outrage. He led a raiding party 600 miles over the desert to avenge an insult to a girl he had never seen.

Every Arab tribesman when excited will call out the name of his sister, a custom surprising to Europeans. The very word for a war-cry in tribal Arabic is "nakhwa" or a brother call. "Defeat of the Knights—I'm the brother of Nura!" the bedouin horseman would call as he cantered in front of the battle line, balancing his long lance. War-cries in the names of sweethearts were also used, such as "for the eyes of Hamda," and many Arab ballads and riding songs introduced the theme of "the eyes which love me." The sister name would also be used to rouse the courage of another. "Don't leave me behind, O brother of Wadhha!" cried a wounded man lying on the ground, and the warrior thus addressed was fain to turn back into the teeth of the enemy's fire to rescue his comrade.

An interesting variant of the sister cry was the case of Ibn Mashhur, a family of the Ruwallah. The Sherarat are a despised tribe, and it happened that one day the great Shaikh Ibn Shaalan had seized something from an old woman of this tribe called Robda. The son of Mashhur came gallantly to the rescue of the low-bred hag, and rescued her from the exactions of the chief. In commemoration of this chivalrous action, the family adopted the war-cry of "Brothers of Robda."

The study of Arab war-cries is, indeed, a subject in itself to which European Arabists never seem to have done justice. The camel has always been the main prize of bedouin tribal contests, and as the stake for which so many generations of warriors have given their lives, the camel has acquired a romantic aura as emotional as the war-banner or the colours of British regiments. The nomad has no land to call forth his devotion and sacrifice. The camel flock for him replaces the fatherland. Shaikhs make a speciality of their camel flocks, and most tribal leaders used to pride themselves on a flock of white camels. The Shaikhs of Mutair, on the other hand, the Doshan family, had a flock of black camels which they called the "sharf" or honour. The sharf was the rallying-point of the tribe, and Mutair used to boast that it had never been captured.

At the battle of Tarafiya, between Ibn Rasheed and Ibn Saud, a famous Rasheed flock of camels called the Sakhariyat was deliberately driven towards the enemy's lines. All Shammar charged to save the Sakhariyat from falling into the hands of the enemy.

Not only great chiefs but almost every bedouin will have a family camel-name, which he will also use as a war-cry; and in battle may be heard such shouts as "The horseman of the Gurwa, Suwait!"—"The horseman of the Aliya, Al Nuri." The word "ra'ai" originally means a herdsman, but has also come to mean lord or owner. Thus Ibn Shaalan, the great Shaikh of the Ruwallah, can be addressed (to rouse his mettle) as "Ra'ai al Aliya"—the "aliya" being the traditional family camel. I even acquired one of these myself—by adoption. It was in 1928 in the deserts of Iraq, when the tribes were under great fear of attack by the Ikhwan. I was sent to the scene of the trouble, and was supported by a promise of help from aircraft and armoured cars. A meeting of bedouins was discussing the situation, and one of them whose family camel was called Al Buweidha—the Little White One—proclaimed his confidence in my proposals. To illustrate that he was prepared to entrust his dearest to me, he cried: "He is the Lord of the Buweidha!" The name remained, and I ever afterwards enjoyed in bedouin circles the title of "Ra'ai al Buweidha."

The idea of protection of the weak is fundamental to Arab ideas of honour, just as it was in European chivalry. Something of this spirit is illustrated in the case of the Mashhur family related above. The absence of a settled government to whom the oppressed could appeal may also have given rise to the system of knightly protection of the weak.

The most common illustration of this code is the custom of the "dakheel." This word means originally one who enters in, but in the present connection it means a person appealing for help. Any Arab to whom this appeal is made, even by a complete stranger or a person who has just committed a crime, will throw down whatever he is doing and defend his protégé with his life. Beside the tent of any great tribal chief can always be seen a line of small tents of various dimensions. These are the families who have placed themselves under the shaikh's protection, and are

known as his "neighbours." Some of the neighbours may be the victims of a blood feud escaping from the retribution of the relatives of the murdered man. Others may be people who have been unfortunate, having lost all their animals in an enemy raid or by an epidemic, while others again may be poor and destitute widows or orphans. Arab honour prescribes that the warrior must give his poor neighbours precedence before his nearest relatives and must defend their interests with his life. The very old story of Muhammel al Muhadi may give some idea of the lengths to which the idea was carried.

Muhammel al Muhadi was a Shaikh of Aneizah who one day fell wounded and unconscious when leading a charge of his followers against a hostile tribe. A man of the enemy picked up the unconscious man and carried him to his tent, where he and his wife cared for him and after many weeks nursed him back to health without being aware of his identity.

When he felt strong enough to undertake the journey back to his tribe, he made himself known to his benefactors and gave them his signet-ring. He assured them that he would always remember the debt he owed to them, and begged them, if they were ever in need, to appeal to him.

Twenty years later, the man and his wife found themselves in great straits. Their flocks had been raided by an enemy, and the remnant of animals they had been able to scrape together had been attacked by the mange and died. From comparative prosperity they found themselves reduced to destitution and their children threatened with starvation. In these straits, they remembered that they had once befriended the great Shaikh of Aneizah, and decided to appeal to him. Travelling wearily on foot over the desert, their few remaining possessions loaded on a single mangy camel, they arrived after many days at the huge black tent of Al Muhadi. The shaikh at first failed to recognize them until they presented the signet-ring. Then he embraced them tenderly, caused a comfortable tent to be pitched for them, spread with carpets, and, dividing his flocks in half, drove a great number of camels and sheep to their tent. The two families were bound by deep affection, and were constantly in and out of each other's tents. Their children grew up as brothers and sisters.



The Muhadi had a young son, a gallant youth, the hope of his father and adored by the whole tribe. This son once spent a long day out hawking, and returning in the evening exhausted came first to the tent of the neighbours, in the shade of which he threw himself down and in a few minutes was fast asleep. The neighbour's wife, seeing him, covered him with a rug and was leaning over him in the dusk when her husband entered the tent. Not recognizing the male figure over which his wife was leaning so tenderly, he drew his sword in a frenzy of jealousy and struck off the head of his benefactor's son. Horrified at what he had done, he ran in contrition to the shaikh, confessed his crime, and begged that his own head be struck off in retribution. But Al Muhadi replied that the thing was from God, and would not cause him to fail in the duty of protection towards his neighbours. After midnight, when the encampment was still beneath the moonlight, the shaikh carried the body of his son and deposited it in the middle of the camp between the tents. There in the morning it was discovered by the tribesmen. Who had killed the shaikh's son, the hope and idol of the tribe? But the murderer could never be found.

Weeks slipped by, when one day the Muhadi's daughter came to her father in distress and told him how she had always looked upon the neighbours' two sons as her brothers until that day they had endeavoured to assault her. What was she to do, and how could she go out or meet them again? But her father said that she must look after herself, for they were his neighbours and under his protection. The murder of his son or the attempted rape of his daughter would not induce him to speak a rough word to a family which he considered to be under his protection.

The story, like most old Arab stories, ends with a poem, said to have been sung by Al Muhadi to the accompaniment of his violin, sitting alone over the embers of the fire in his guest tent, when all the camp was asleep.

*"The words of Muhadi (Al Muhadi Muhammel),  
Torn at heart by anguish unsuspected by all.  
If I reveal it 'twill but wake the malice of my enemies.  
If I hide it, it poisons my soul with its gall. . . ."*

The quality most universally and most justly associated with

the Arabs is hospitality. This quality they carry to extremes unconnected with the everyday world, and worthy of fairyland alone. Arab hospitality, like Arab courage, is fantastic, dramatic, romantic and unconnected with the practical needs of the situation. The Arab tribesman, clad often in rags and frequently hungry, lives in a world of dreams in which he behaves like a fairy Prince Charming.

He may live in a tent scarcely larger than an ordinary bed, on an income of £15 a year, with a wife and several children. He may be dressed only in a "shirt" and a poor cloak, and may possess only one goat, on the milk of which his children keep alive. But he will not hesitate to run across to a desert track to intercept a car carrying a distinguished (and probably wealthy) traveller, and struggle to persuade him to stop with him for lunch. Should he consent, the solitary goat will be sacrificed for the feast, without a thought for the morrow.

The eighteenth chapter of Genesis could be applied to the Huwaitat today.

"And the Lord appeared unto him [Abraham] in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;

"And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground.

"And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant:

"Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree:

"And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts: after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said.

"And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth.

"And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it.

"And he took butter and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat."

Every little touch is true today. The tent owner sitting in the heat of the day seeing three strange men must needs run to intercept them. Afraid lest they refuse should he ask them to a large meal, he suggests just a little water and a slice of bread. But as soon as he has got his way and persuaded them to sit down, then he tells his wife to bake fresh bread (they still do it in the embers on the hearth) and runs and kills a calf, and dresses it and brings milk and butter—a real banquet, although he has no idea who the travellers are.

How many hundreds of times have bedouins run to meet me in just such a way, and said pleadingly: "Just a cup of coffee, and a morsel of bread all'mashi—as you walk along—you need scarcely stop a moment." And having decoyed my party unwillingly into the tent, the host disappears. An hour later, the morsel of bread as we walk not having appeared, we look at our watches and say dubiously that we really are in a hurry. But our hosts brazenly reply that a camel has been slaughtered, and there is nothing for it but to wait three hours for a vast banquet.

As a child, I remember thinking that Luke xiv. 21–23 was rather an unreal story.

"Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

"And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.

"And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."

Since I came to the Arabs, I have seen just such scenes. In the tent of a shaikh during dinner, his retainers will scour the vicinity, and may be heard shouting:

"O boy! Come here! Come and dine."

"I have had dinner."

"That won't do—come here and eat, man!"

"By Allah! I am not hungry."

By this time a stalwart retainer has seized the modest passer-by and is pushing him into the tent. "I adjure you, by Allah, to eat! It won't do! You must dine!" and so on.

Ibn Muheid, a great Shaikh of Aneizah, is said to have called in all passers-by to dinner every night for six months during a year of famine. The phrase "Ibn Muheid is calling to dinner" has become a proverb in Northern Arabia.

Reformers amongst the Arabs at times oppose these age-old customs, which they declare in a materialistic age to be economically unsound. Perhaps they are right, but I cannot help thinking that many a poor bedouin, like Abraham himself, may have entertained angels unawares.

One of the most curious freaks of Arab generosity is their hospitality to animals. There was a man of the Huwaitat surnamed "The diner of wolves." Whenever he heard a wolf howl at night near his tent, he took a goat out and tied it to a tent-peg before his tent. "No guest shall pass my tent at sunset without dining," he used to explain.

A more fantastic case occurred amongst the Dhafir tribe, when they were camped one flaming summer day in the sand-dunes. One of the tents was pitched at a short distance from the rest of the camp, and into the shade of this tent staggered an exhausted wolf and lay down panting. The tent owner hastened to welcome the guest, and fetched water to slake his thirst. The wolf rested till sundown.

Meanwhile another tribesman happened to pass and, seeing the wolf, unslung his rifle, but the tent owner ran out, and declared with an oath that the man's life would be forfeit if he shot his guest. The other tribesman said nothing, but in the sunset coolness the wolf got up and trotted away. A few minutes later a shot rang out. His former host arrived only in time to see his "guest" in its last struggles in a pool of blood. He loaded his rifle, pursued the murderer and shot him dead. A family blood-feud lasting several generations ensued.

The bedouins pride themselves on their honesty in preserving property left with them for safe custody. It is related of Imru al-Qais, a famous poet before the rise of Islam, that his father had been murdered by other men of his tribe. He struggled in vain to revenge himself upon the murderers, but the rival faction were

too strong for him. Finally he made up his mind to appeal to the Byzantine Government in Constantinople. Before leaving his home for the imperial capital, he deposited his weapons and armour in the custody of Samweel, the Amir of the oasis of Jauf. After the departure of Imru al Qais, his enemies advanced on Jauf and demanded from the Amir the surrender of the armour. The latter indignantly refused to betray his trust.

By singular ill-fortune, however, the Amir's son, on a hunting expedition, fell into the hands of the enemies of Imru al Qais. These then addressed Samweel once again, threatening to kill his son if the armour were not surrendered. But the Amir replied that to lose his son would cause a short-lived pang of sorrow, whereas to betray his trust would be an eternal shame. The boy was killed, but the armour was safely kept until the return of its owner.

Auda abu Taya, Shaikh of the Huwaitat and the ally of Feisal and Lawrence, once led a raid on the tribe of Aneizah. As the Huwaitat charged into the enemy camp, a man of Aneizah threw himself on the mercy of Auda. The latter accepted his surrender and assured him that no harm would come to him. The prisoner, however, pressed the shaikh to give him a sign which he could show to the raiders, as proof that their chief had spared his life. Auda hastily pulled off the kerchief which was tied round his head and threw it to the man, riding on bare-headed into the battle. Several years later, Auda received a message from a man of Aneizah to the effect that he was looking after a flock of goats for him. Left with Auda's kerchief after the battle, the man was unwilling to make away with his protector's property. He sold the kerchief and with the money he bought a goat. After many years of breeding, the goat had produced a flock. A desert traveller was entrusted with a message for Auda. The latter had long since forgotten the incident of the kerchief, and had never known the man's name. Although the two tribes were still at feud, the flock of goats was driven to Auda's tent by a hired herdsman.

The Arab tribesman has an intense sense of the dramatic. He is carried away by a striking situation or a noble gesture. In this connection a remarkable institution is that of the "jaha" or

deputation. For many offences, such as murder or rape, the compensation payable under tribal custom is so heavy as to be sufficient to enrich the recipient perhaps for life. Yet a poor tribesman will constantly refuse to accept such compensation unless the offender and his friends be willing to sue for peace. In these circumstances a deputation of the prominent men of the tribe will proceed to the tent of the offended party, and intercede with him to accept compensation and abandon revenge. His pride being thus salved, a poor bedouin will often forgo the prospect of wealth in order to make a dramatic gesture of forgiveness before a noble audience.

The same spirit of *beau-geste* occurs even in minor matters of everyday life. A man may argue long and bitterly to secure the payment of a debt. But if the defendant can humble himself to say: "I ask you to forgive me, O brother of Nura" (naming his sister), the obstinately pleaded case will be forthwith abandoned. With a noble gesture, the creditor will proclaim the case to be over and the debt forgotten.

This spirit of romance used to—and indeed still does—control much of Arab life. The thirst for praise and a love of dramatic actions outweighs the dictates of reason or the material needs of a poor people. The same spirit was carried across North Africa and Spain to Southern France by the Muslim armies of the ninth century. It deeply affected, if it did not indeed create, the chivalry of Western Europe. Three and a half centuries later, when the first Crusaders landed in Palestine, they found in that country a system of chivalry closely resembling their own. It was no accident that Spain and Southern France became *par excellence* the homes of European chivalry in its most quixotic form. For Spain was ruled by the Arabs for 600 years, and the south of France was their nearest European neighbour.

One day in the spring of 1929 in the southern deserts of Iraq, we had captured several hundred camels from a tribe of Ikhwan. The same people had frequently plundered the tribes of Iraq, and I decided to divide the camels we had seized between the Iraqi victims of former Ikhwan raids. To divide a flock of camels between a number of bedouins is like dividing a piece of raw

meat between a horde of hungry cats. A good deal of snatching and snarling is liable to ensue. It was while we were struggling to disentangle the conflicting claims to compensation of a crowd of men of the Dhafir, that one of my own men whispered in my ear: "We have here the son of Ibn Hamdan. The Ikhwan killed his father on the day of Al Qusair. You should give him a camel."

Standing demurely a few yards away, I saw a slender youth of perhaps fifteen years old, with those refined, almost girlish, features which are sometimes to be seen amongst desert dwellers.

"Bring out that young riding camel for Ibn Hamdan's boy," I said, pointing to a young camel as agile as a deer, which kept stampeding the flock. Four bedouins grabbed the roaring animal and dragged it from the confusion of the crowd.

"Here you are," they shouted to Ibn Hamdan's boy; "take over, lad!" The bedouins faced the young camel towards the open desert, struck it across the rump and let go. The shy boy suddenly sprang to life. Slipping his cloak from his shoulders, he grasped a tuft of hair on the hump of the galloping camel. The latter roared, bucked like a wild horse and plunged away. But Ibn Hamdan's boy hung on. He was half dragged and half running in giant strides beside the plunging brute. Then suddenly as light as a feather he vaulted on to its back, and was clinging precariously to the hump, leaning forward and tapping the camel's neck with his cane.

The following year I was transferred to Trans-Jordan and saw no more of the Dhafir. Two years later I was sitting in one of our new desert forts in Trans-Jordan, when a tall, slender youth presented himself. "I am Nehhab, the son of Hamdan," he explained. "You once gave me a camel. May God prolong your life! I want to be with you."

I thought him at first too young to be enlisted, but two months later I gave way. After a year's service, he became my orderly. His whole manner breathed gentleness. His beardless face was frank and open, with delicate features. He spoke softly and with a gentle kindness.

Bedouin litigants are maddeningly importunate. Every petitioner demands an instant interview. If his request be not immediately granted, he will repeat it many times a day at all

hours, hoping to extort consent by making life unbearable. In such circumstances, my orderly was often subjected to importunities which were nothing short of exasperating. In his endeavours to allow me sometimes to work or rest without interruption, he constantly exposed himself to violent reproaches, if not actual abuse. On no occasion that I remember did he lose his temper. With imperturbable gentleness he would fend off the most importunate litigants.

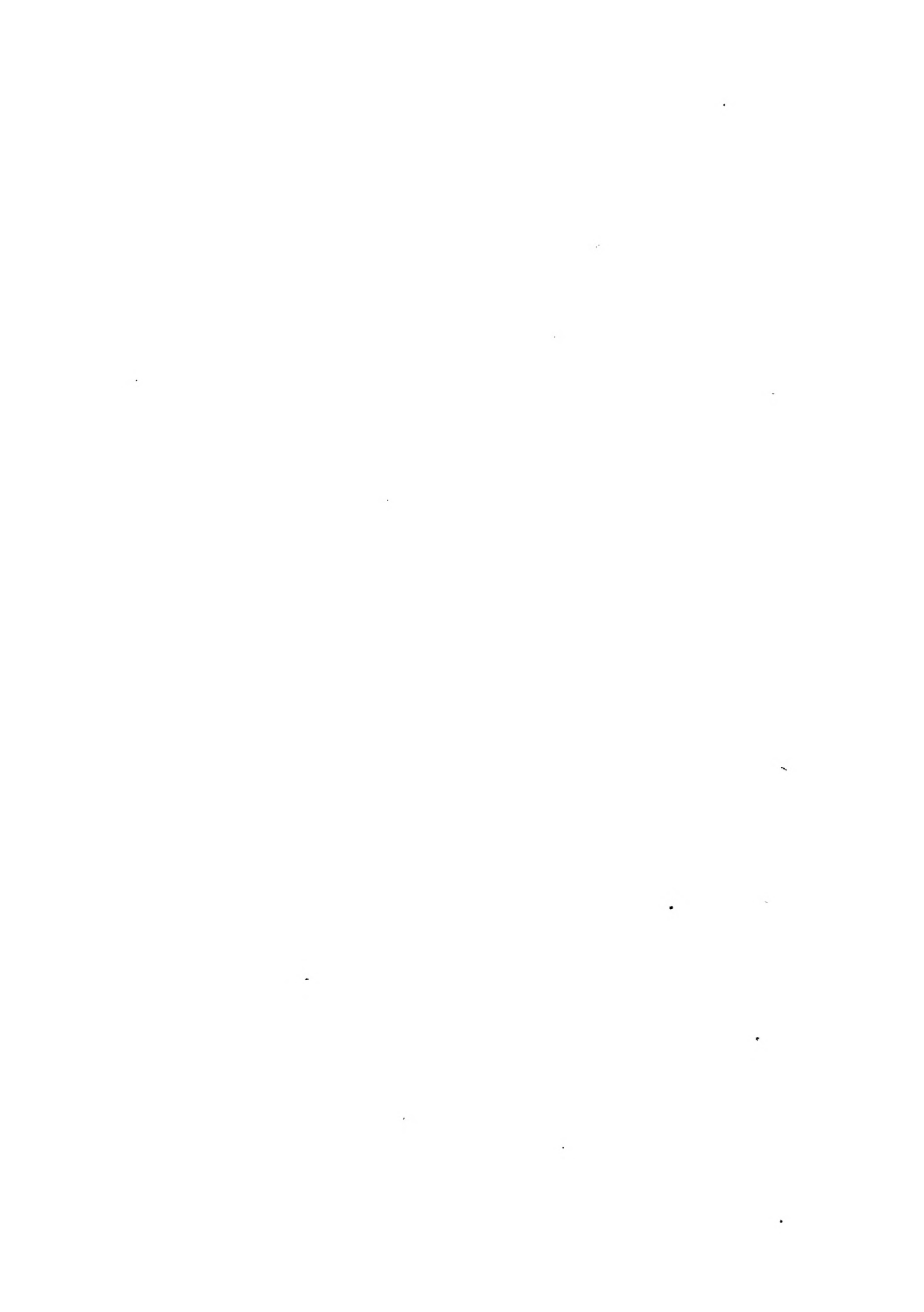
"Forgive my shortcomings," he would murmur humbly. "May God guide you! Welcome! Welcome! In a blessed hour, we see you. If you will be so kind as to come tomorrow morning at nine!" To every applicant he showed the same gentle smile.

With this quiet and mild disposition, he combined absence of fear in battle and a clear brain which enabled him at all times to grasp the essentials of a situation. Arab courage and hardihood are to some extent appreciated in Europe. Their code of chivalry has not passed completely unnoticed by travellers and historians. But this streak of gentleness, which here and there runs through the Arab character, has rarely been remarked by Western writers.

In England a boy so gentle as Nehhab would have been tormented and mocked. We seem at times to think too much of toughness, and to mistake loudness and bad manners for courage. Amongst the bedouins, who lived in a world of violence, bloodshed and war, gentleness was not mistaken for cowardice. Intimacy with Arab tribesmen enabled me to visualize more clearly the age of chivalry in England. In contrast to the respectable sameness of Suburbia, the ages of both English and Arab chivalry impressed by their violent contrasts and deep emotions. I have seen among the Arabs depths of hatred, reckless bloodshed and lust of plunder of which our lukewarm natures seem no longer capable. I have seen deeds of generosity worthy of fairy-tales and acts of treachery of extraordinary baseness. Unscrupulous men of violence, and others so gentle that they could scarcely have lived in modern England.

The Arabs, like all other races, are neither all saints nor all sinners. But the contrasts between them are more striking and dramatic than those which are outwardly perceptible between the inhabitants of Western Europe.





# IX

## *Labour of Love*

"I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love."

HOSEA xi. 4.

"Gagnez les cœurs, car les hommes sont plus importants que les affaires."

PASCAL.



## IX

### LABOUR OF LOVE

THE years 1932 to 1936 passed in quiet progress and steady upbuilding in Trans-Jordan. Little did we guess at the time that they were to be followed by ten years of trouble and fighting all around us.

In the desert, the last raid took place in July of 1932. But to put an end to tribal wars was obviously a negative accomplishment. The desert and its tribes had never been administered by any previous Government, at any rate for many centuries. Stone forts, equipped with wireless, had been erected on most of the principal wells in the desert, and our little patrol of four machine-gun trucks moved backwards and forwards between the forts. But in reality the Trans-Jordan deserts, which contained perhaps fifteen or twenty thousand men capable of bearing arms, had been won by love and not by force.

Occasional thefts of three or four camels each continued for a few more years, and then ceased also, and the standard of public security in the desert was soon higher than in most European countries, even including the British Isles. This result was further remarkable because the carrying of firearms in the desert was not forbidden, and, in fact, nearly every man possessed a rifle.

This success was largely achieved by goodwill. When the Desert Patrol enlisted its first recruit, the bedouins were bitterly hostile to the Government, which they believed to be working actively for their extermination. The tribes refused co-operation, and tribesmen fled incontinently or crouched in hiding when they saw a car or a soldier. The first step towards a better state of affairs was taken when local tribesmen began to enlist in the Desert Patrol. I made a practice of travelling from fort to fort and collecting the men at each post round the fire for a talk. We discussed the moral duties of Government from first principles.

Traditions of Turkish misrule, followed by the recent mishandling of the raiding situation, had deeply implanted in the mind of every tribesman the idea that the interests of tribes and Governments were diametrically and inevitably opposed. The suggestion that Government was interested in promoting their welfare and assisting them to prosperity came to them like a new gospel from heaven. Once the soldiers were convinced, each one of them became an apostle of the new glad tidings. Every patrol of camelmen which dismounted in the black hair tents for a cup of coffee repeated the same amazing message—"This Government is different. It wants to help you!" We even invented a series of slogans which we posted up in each desert fort. One of them read: "The reason for the existence of the Desert Patrol is to increase the prosperity of the Arabs."

To foster economic prosperity is perhaps outside the duties of a normal police force, but the Desert Patrol was not so much a police force as a patriarchy. The claim that we did increase the prosperity of the Arabs was, however, perfectly true, as we constantly pointed out. For raiding was, from the economic stand-point, a form of gambling. Every bedouin dreamed of the day when he should ride triumphantly into camp driving fifty fat milch camels before him, and enjoy wealth and ease for the rest of his days. But in reality he was just as likely to lose all his camels to an enemy raider and find himself suddenly a pauper. In any case, in every raid a number of camels, horses, sheep and men were killed or incapacitated. Obviously, therefore, though a few lucky ones might win a prize, the aggregate of tribal wealth was reduced.

Even more damaging to the total wealth of the tribes was the limitation imposed on grazing by tribal wars. Many tents were compelled to remain concentrated in large encampments so as to be strong enough to defend themselves. The grazing round these large camps was soon eaten down. While whole tribes remained concentrated in this manner, vast areas of desert lay ungrazed between them, clothed waist deep in grass and bushes. No sooner was complete public security established, than big encampments vanished. Instead of them, one or two scattered tents could be found alone in every little valley in the desert. The increase in livestock owned by the tribes as a whole, as a

result of safe and unrestricted grazing, exceeded any increases they might have hoped for by raiding other tribes.

Again and again, when discussing the prosperity of the tribes on these lines with the soldiers of the Desert Patrol seated round the fire in one of the forts, I have noticed one of them hastily wiping the tears from his eyes. It was pathetic to realize that the mere idea that the Government could be interested in their affairs was enough to move them to tears. The tribes had been so often represented as a savage and reactionary element which must be crushed by force if the Arab people were to progress.

We were, nevertheless, unlucky at first from an economic point of view, for in the year after the end of raiding the rains failed and a state approaching famine resulted. Instead of beginning in November, the heavy rains did not begin to fall until the beginning of January. December was a month of bitter cold, with the desert bare, dusty and waterless, and a black frost each night. The site of every encampment was marked by the rotting carcasses of dead camels and sheep. So intense was the poverty that instances occurred of parents abandoning their children, particularly amongst the Beni Atiya from the Hejaz and Ahl al Jebel, the mountain tribes of the Jebel Druze lava.

The Iraq Petroleum Company were at the time laying their pipeline across the desert from Iraq to Haifa. The line passed through part of the lava country, and I shall never forget seeing a small pack of little children abandoned by their starving parents outside a pipeline camp. As wild as little animals, they had made burrows in the ground to sleep in, wrapped in old corn sacks. During the day they begged in the oil company's camps. A scarcely less horrible story, also amongst Ahl al Jebel, was that of a man who sold his daughter for a sack of stale crusts from the pipeline company's camp cookhouse.

We did what we could to collect clothes, relieve and feed the starving. A special charitable fund was raised to relieve the Beni Hasan tribe. Many starving infants were adopted by the people of the towns, while others crowded round the forts and were fed by the Desert Patrol. The tender heart of the Arab soldier is rarely proof against the solicitations of the beggars, poor relations and hard-luck cases who gather round their camps on pay day,

but in this bitter winter none could blame them for giving away their pay to the heart-rending spectres who crowded around them.

The Arabs are by no means convinced that "He sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust." On the contrary, they believe that the amount of rain which falls is in direct proportion to the good intentions of the rulers of the land. The fact that the first winter after we had established complete control of the desert was a year of drought carried unpleasant suggestions of the evil nature of our intentions. Persons were not wanting to point this moral, and it took us several successive years of prosperity to live down the suspicion that our clandestine wickednesses had caused the famine.

The Ruwallah named this year "Muwaija" or little wave. With that humour partaking closely of both smiles and tears, the bedouins, who always live near to naked death, referred to the tidal wave which swept so many of them into eternity by the playfully diminutive nickname of "wavelet."

In actual fact, those who attributed "wavelet" to the wickedness of the Government were not entirely wrong. Much of the responsibility for the famine rested on us. For we had not realized to what an extent raiding was a social-insurance scheme. Arabia had always been familiar with droughts and famines, but such disasters have rarely covered the whole peninsula. Somewhere one, two or three hundred miles away, the rains have fallen, the earth is warm and green, and the heavy milch camels are grazing their full. In the old days, tribes suffering from drought or famine mounted their camels and set out to raid those to whom nature had been kinder. The balance was redressed by the intensification of raiding by the needy against the more prosperous.

The same automatic system acted indeed to give hope to any who had been unfortunate, whether their animals had been raided by an enemy or killed by the mange. The pauper need never despair in the old days. He had only to saddle his camel, and seek the camels and flocks of the wealthy grazing far and wide over the face of Arabia, in order to retrieve his fortunes. The cessation of raiding at first brought hopeless despair to the poor, and indeed the risk of despair to every stockbreeder. For the desert life is full of risks, not only of raiders, but also of drought, epidemics or a

sudden snow blizzard killing sheep in thousands. In future there would be no hope of recovery for the victims of such disasters. We had thought that the abolition of raiding would increase the security of desert life. But we discovered unexpectedly that raiding had been not only a pastime for the chivalry of Arabia but also a social-security system of which our ill-timed intervention had destroyed the balance.

It was obviously no longer possible to permit the inhabitants of famine areas to retrieve their fortunes by plundering the flocks of their happier neighbours. To prevent a recurrence of "wavelet," it was necessary to find for the tribesmen some sources of revenue other than their flocks. It was this task which occupied most of our thoughts for the next few years.

By the creation of the Desert Patrol, we had indeed opened a new profession to tribal youth. For the moment, however, the number of soldiers enlisted by us was too small to affect the means of livelihood of the tribes as a whole, though it was to expand wholly unexpectedly later on. But the unprecedented step of employing bedouins as soldiers produced one immediate secondary action. Other people, notably the Iraq Petroleum Company, imitated us, and employed bedouins as armed watchmen on their stores and camps.

The most obvious means of livelihood for nomad paupers was agriculture, but to inaugurate it required something of a minor revolution. For the bedouins regarded themselves as a race of aristocrats, to whom manual labour would be a humiliation. Mere wealth weighed for nothing in their eyes compared to the preservation of their traditions. Agriculturists were already on an average much wealthier than they, but this fact did not alter the contempt felt by the nomads for them. In fact, "fellah" or cultivator was a term of abuse amongst bedouins. In these circumstances, to convert them into farmers was not at first easy. Moreover, the land available was not enough to support them entirely, so that they could become only part-time cultivators and part-time stockbreeders. From another point of view this arrangement was ideal, for it meant that they had not all their eggs in one basket. By a perhaps providential dispensation, a year



which produced a grain famine was often an average one for grazing, and vice versa, because grazing and grain crops required rain at different seasons. Thus a family with sheep and camels on the one hand and a few acres under wheat or barley on the other was unlikely to starve completely. By 1939 there was scarcely a bedouin family in Trans-Jordan which did not own its patch of grain crops in addition to its flocks. This was the principal insurance against another "wavelet." If the family also had a man in the Desert Patrol with a permanent salary, they had reached a standard of social security higher than that of the old days when free raiding was available as a fall-back.

That this change-over to agriculture was in the nature of a revolution is shown by the fact that ten years later no such change had taken place in Syria or Iraq. In most cases, the tribes were converted by persuasion. In one or two rare cases, a small amount of pressure was applied. This was particularly so in the case of the Juboor and Bedareen sections of the Beni Sakhr. My first introduction to these two sections was when they indulged in a private battle between themselves. Rightly incensed, we set out with our four trucks full of soldiers to deal with them. We had intended to drive up to their tents, but found that they were camped on a steep and rocky hillside thickly covered with shrubs. As a result, we dismounted and burst through the bushes on foot into the camp of the astonished Juboor. Rounding up all the men in sight, we sat them in a circle, covered them with a pair of machine-guns, and then proceeded to collect all the camels. The tribesmen were completely taken aback by our swift and unforeseen intervention. In punishment for their misconduct we sentenced them there and then to take up farming, and awarded them a large basin of land south-east of Amman in which the sentence was to be carried out.

The whole section was moved under the supervision of a few camel police, and made to camp on their new estate, although individuals kept slipping away and escaping. For the first two years it was uphill work. Ten years later, I paid a special visit to the section again. As far as the eye could reach the land was ploughed where ten years before had been only desert and thorn bushes. Not only so, but these enthusiastic farmers had of their own initi-

ative acquired a neighbouring estate, only a little smaller than the one we had given them. When we drove up, the shaikh of the tribe was supervising the operations of a tractor plough which he had recently bought. As we sat in the guest tent, one tribesman after another came up smiling to shake hands and to say "Praise God, it was you who taught us how to win a livelihood for our wives and children." Such moments are worth all the labour and discouragement of the years of construction. They were anxious for help to build a school, but with all this they had not given up their old tradition—their flocks and camels were grazing in the desert a few miles east of their crops.

Such successes rendered life a joy. Few sights can be more delightful than to see the crops waving, the reapers labouring in the fields or the grain stacked on threshing-floors, in a place which a few years before was desert and thorn bushes—and to think: "We did this." The simple and warm-hearted gratitude of the tribesmen themselves added poignancy to every success.

Perhaps the highest, because unpremeditated, testimony to our work was paid several years later, in the summer of 1940, after the collapse of France. A man of the Beni Sakhr had been in the town of Amman, and was riding back home over the desert on his camel, when he saw a flock of grazing camels. The herdsman ran across to the traveller to ask the news. The camel rider told of the rumours circulating in Amman, how France had surrendered and the Germans were arriving in Syria. "Some people say," he added, "that the Germans will soon be in Amman and the present Government will be driven out." "Ya Heif!" said the ragged herdsman, scratching his head. "Alas! people like us don't want this Government to go, for we know that we could never again find another like it."

The opinion has often been expressed that education "spoils" tribesmen, and that not by Europeans alone but by many of the tribesman's own compatriots. I have heard Arabs say: "Poor so-and-so's son has gone wrong and is a great worry to his father. But, after all, he has only himself to blame, because he gave him too much education." It scarcely strikes us how extraordinary such a statement is. Yet we do not in England hear blame laid

on parents for educating their children. If education "spoils" tribesmen, it must be because it is education of the wrong kind.

In any case, the East is avid for education, and education it will have. The only question is whether it will be good and beneficial education or not. There can be scarcely any hesitation, then, as to the course to be followed. Education there must be, and the more the better if it be good and beneficial education, and suited to the pupils. In the case of tribesmen, suitability may perhaps be defined as an education which will not destroy their traditional moral background, and which will on the material side fit the pupils for the type of life which they will lead.

These niceties, however, scarcely arose in our tribal society where, in 1930, less than one person in a thousand could read and write. The first need seemed, therefore, to be to spread the three "R's" more generously. This task had an immediate practical as well as a theoretical object. Before 1914 tribesmen and town merchants engaged in as many commercial transactions as now. But in those days no written documents or undertakings were signed. The tribesman and the townsman seem to have trusted one another. Transactions were often made verbally, perhaps sitting round the public guest room. Twenty-five years ago, if one asked a tribesman how much he owed to a merchant, he would say: "I don't know, ask him"; without any apparent shadow of suspicion that the merchant might not speak the truth. Nearly all this is now changed. Transactions are recorded in documents witnessed by the notary public, and extortionate usury—sometimes even deception and forgery—are frequent occurrences. The law courts are crowded with litigants. In such a world, the illiterate tribesman is both an anomaly and an easy victim.

In every way, therefore, there was no alternative to furthering education for the tribesman by all possible means. Our first efforts were directed to the establishment of schools for children in the desert. We were only partially successful, owing to the obstacle of nomadism. For nomadism rendered it impossible for the parents to remain camped near the school building. If they did so for two or three months in summer, the first winter rains would tempt them to move to better grazing and to carry off the children

with them. Only by accepting boarders, and supplying them with food and clothing free of charge, could we make certain of retaining pupils.

Nomadism was thus a genuine difficulty even for the parent most anxious for the education of his children, for the mothers were rarely willing to leave their children behind when the tribe moved out into the desert. Those who believe that women enjoy no influence in Muslim society should have seen some of the fathers whom we took to task for withdrawing their sons from school. "What can I do?" they would answer sheepishly, "his mother will not agree to part with him." Amongst the very poor also it is the custom for children of eight years old and upwards to work as shepherds or goatherds. To leave such a child at school meant that the family had to pay a hired shepherd.

Faced with these difficulties and without financial resources, we were able to maintain only a small number of nomad children permanently at school. These consisted mostly of the sons of soldiers of the Desert Patrol or of orphans whom somehow or other we managed to feed and clothe. Such schools were useful in so far as they supplied the soldiers of the next generation for the Desert Patrol, but they did little to leaven the lump of tribal illiteracy. Perhaps they increased the rate of literacy from one to two or three per thousand.

A more important result was, however, produced by teaching the soldiers themselves to read and write. Men in their twenties learn less easily than in their teens, but, on the other hand, the value of education can be explained to them, and they can be persuaded to work of their own free will. We succeeded in raising an immense enthusiasm for reading and writing in the Desert Patrol.

The consumption of pencils, copy-books and "Ras-Ru'us" (the local "Reading without Tears") was enormous. In every desert post wild, bearded faces could be seen crouching over copy-books, slowly tracing the alphabet, while horny hands gripped the pencil much as they had been wont to grip a lance or rifle. All efforts were bent on preparing to show results on the occasion of my next visit to the post. The hours of daylight were usually spent on inspecting the post, looking at the camels or hearing

tribal petitioners. The great moment was after dinner, when we sat round the fire and drank tea. The post commander fidgeted nervously, shifted the cups about, made furtive signs to his supporters and eventually burst out: "Ya sēyyidi! My Lord! Would you like to see the soldiers' handwriting?" "By Allah! I want to see it," I would answer with delight, as though this were a sudden and quite unexpected treat. My words were followed by a stampede. Every man had, of course, laboriously prepared an exhibition piece of calligraphy for just this very moment. In less than a minute they were all crowding back round the fire, each grasping a piece of paper or a copy-book.

The majority would produce a sheet on which was written in slightly shaky characters the words "His Excellency the Commander of the Desert Patrol. Sir!" A few bright young men would have continued with the words: "I have served for two years in the Desert Patrol without leave, and for urgent family reasons . . ."

At the end of the party, a number of old stagers would bashfully proffer dirty pieces of paper on which the first three letters of the alphabet were shakily inscribed, murmuring apologetically: "Ma sar li zeman" ("I haven't been at it for long"). How could one demand such trivialities from the scarred veterans of fifty raids and battles? There was nothing for it but to express surprise and satisfaction at the progress made by all concerned since my last visit, though pointing out at the same time that the standard reached was still not quite adequate, and that further efforts were necessary before I came again.

At this, everyone would smile with satisfaction, salute smartly, say: "God prolong your life, Sir!" and a fresh brew of tea would be called for.

One of the important subjects calling for decision in the desert was the nature of the law to be observed in both criminal and civil cases. The subject requires some explanation. There exists in Arabia a body of customary law several thousand years old; that is to say, dating from before the rise of both Christianity and Islam. This law is commonly called, and will be referred to hereafter, as tribal law.

The Prophet Muhamad, however, laid down a number of rules for conduct and for the settlement of disputes, for which he claimed the authority of divine inspiration. Generally speaking, these laws resembled Arab tribal law, with certain modifications, more than they resembled modern European law. This body of Muslim Religious law is normally known as the Sharia law.

Finally, since about 1870, the Turks began to introduce laws copied from Modern European codes, chiefly the French *Code Napoléon*. When the Turks introduced reforms, they usually adopted them wholesale from European countries, without greatly concerning themselves as to their suitability to the particular people on whom they were to be imposed. Still less did they consider the desirability of carrying out any form of education to explain to the public the advantages of the changes proposed. But even worse was the fact that the Turks had not the power completely to enforce the laws which they introduced. As a result, their new European laws were fairly satisfactorily enforced in the cities alone. In the villages, the new laws were observed less and less as the distance from the big garrison towns increased. Finally, in the desert and among the remoter tribes, no notice whatever was taken of the new European laws and law-courts, and respect was accorded to Arab tribal law alone.

The existence of different communities in the same country observing entirely different laws was liable, as may be imagined, to give rise to confusion, especially as the city dwellers recognizing European law and the bedouins following the old tribal code were only the two clear-cut extremes. Between them the population shaded off gradually from townsmen to nomads, including every possible degree and variety of observance of the two codes mixed, or of the greater part of one code with minor influence of the other.

Confusing as this system was, it was by no means unprecedented in history. When, for example, the barbarians overran the Western Roman Empire, the Franks had laws of their own resembling in some respects Arab tribal law. The Gallo-Roman inhabitants of Gaul followed Roman laws, on which modern European legislation is to some extent based. For many years the

two codes existed in Gaul side by side—the Franks being tried by their tribal custom, the Gauls by Roman law.

The Sharia law had in the Turkish Empire, and hence in the Arab countries, been largely relegated to matters of private status—births, marriages, divorces, death and inheritance. Either the Turkish pseudo-European code or alternatively Arab tribal custom, or a mixture of both, covered most of the field of criminal and civil law. The Turkish law alone was legal. Tribal customs were observed in rural areas merely because the Turkish Government was not strong enough to secure the observance of its own laws.

The difference between European law and tribal custom is fundamental. Wherever and under whatever conditions men have to live, they create institutions intended, as far as possible, to secure their own prosperity and security. The Arab tribe was, and in most cases still is, so democratic as to be almost entirely lacking in discipline. The ordinary tribal shaikh has no power to enforce compliance with his decisions. Tribal law is, therefore, based on the absence of any central authority, and hence on the absence of punishment. It is, in fact, little more than civil law, laying down the compensation to be paid to the aggrieved party. Even where damages are awarded, however, there are no police to enforce payment unless the plaintiff can himself collect it. Thus, in tribal law there is no State interested in punishing offenders in order to deter others from crime. There is only the aggrieved party seeking justice. In order, however, to give some security to individuals, the tribe, the section and the family support the aggrieved party in obtaining his rights.

Another aspect of tribal law is that the same crime differs according to the circumstances and the identity of the victim. To murder or rob a member of an enemy tribe (in the days of tribal war) was, of course, no crime at all. To kill a man of another but a friendly tribe cost the murderer only seven camels in compensation. To kill a man of his own tribe would cost fifty camels and many other expenses. In either case, if the victim were at the time a guest of the murderer, the compensation would be quadrupled.

In the case of murder, however, the compensation would



*Frank Hurley*

Plucking with oars in the ruins of Jerash

REPRODUCED BY THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES





Royal Escort, Amman

rarely if ever be handed over immediately. The relatives of the victim would refuse money for a man only just dead, and the murderer and his relations would be driven into exile to another tribe, probably for at least seven years, after which negotiations for a reconciliation might be initiated.

The assessment of blood-money contained many interesting survivals. The usual compensation was fifty camels, and a girl, known as the "ghurra." In many tribes the compensation included also a negro slave, a rifle, and any camel, the property of the murderer, which the victim's relations chose. This camel was called the "talba." The significance of these items was that the murderer had deprived the victim's family of a valuable asset in the form of a fighting man. The blood-money was intended to make good the loss. The girl was to be married to the nearest relative of the deceased and to produce a male child. The slave, the weapon and the riding camel were the equipment of the warrior. The payment being regarded as compensation, not as punishment, no difference was made whether the murder was intentional or accidental.

The complications of tribal law were many, and elaborate procedure existed for the settlement of all forms of dispute. In former days, the tribal shaikhs were usually both competent and impartial judges, although contact with another civilization has tended to vitiate the system.

European criminal codes are by contrast concerned only with punishment of the offenders, not with the award of compensation to the victims. To prohibit the trial of cases by tribal laws and to substitute a modern criminal code was, therefore, quite unacceptable to tribesmen, who were interested solely in their compensation, not in the abstract question of the punishment of crime. If they did not receive the blood-money, they would commit a murder of revenge, regardless of the fact that the murderer had been sentenced to a term of imprisonment.

I have somewhere seen a statement attributed to Mahatma Gandhi to the effect that we should start with the local institutions and then modify them as is found necessary to suit modern conditions. This was the system we adopted with the nomadic tribes which had never before been administered by a Government. It

was necessary gradually to introduce the principle of punishment, but without abolishing the customs regarding compensation. In the case of murder, the original compensation was retained, but the habit of handing over girls was forbidden, and it was agreed that five camels should take the place of the "ghurra." When the case had been decided by tribal custom, the Government had the power to give one year's imprisonment. In due course, as the system progressed, the penalties were increased, but it must always be emphasized that laws can be enforced only as long as a considerable proportion of the public approves of them. Certain other Governments proved the truth of this maxim when they tried to enforce European laws on tribes. The result was that no crimes were reported to the police, or if any were investigated no witnesses could ever be found. Our progress was perhaps slower, but at least we carried public opinion with us in every forward step. As a result, although the penalties imposed may have been comparatively light, we never missed a criminal because we enjoyed the perfect co-operation of the tribesmen.

The Huwaitat presented many interesting features as compared with other nomadic tribes. Living for many centuries past in the wild and precipitous mountains of southern Trans-Jordan, they had been passed by the great tribal migrations which had swept from Central Arabia up the great open plains into Syria. They were most persistent and complicated litigants. Whereas most other tribes were satisfied with a single tribal judge to settle a dispute, the Huwaitat demanded: "Three from the nose of nine—three flying, three galloping and three alighting." This impressive formula meant that nine judges were first selected, from whom three were first eliminated, and then three more. This left three judges to try the case, but they did not do so sitting as a court. Each one sat separately as a single judge, and the case was tried three times. If two of the judges agreed in their findings, their decision was adopted.

The process of choosing the three judges from nine and trying the case separately three times had probably occupied several weeks or months, but the Huwaiti litigant was by no means discouraged. One side or the other would frequently announce a "tafweel," which meant that they rejected the judges' findings

and demanded a retrial. If the whole process of "Three from the nose of nine" were once more repeated, the parties were still not at the end of their resources. For under their tribal custom, the head of a family or section could plead on behalf of any of his followers. Having, therefore, lost the case for the second time, one of the parties would produce an ancient patriarch who stated the litigants to be junior members of his family. He would claim that they were not responsible for their actions, and would allege that any trials which had taken place in his absence were null and void. This worthy shaikh then demanded the selection of three from the nose of nine to enable him to plead the whole case afresh on behalf of his ignorant junior relations. It is not surprising that this legal system had resulted in the existence of more unsettled feuds between Huwaitat than in any other tribe I had met.

These delays and retrials were not, however, due solely to stubbornness. For the Huwaitat were remarkably fluent speakers. The hearing of an important dispute provided an enjoyable entertainment for the whole camp, and an opportunity for the litigants and their shaikhs to exhibit their eloquence. The hearing took place in the tent of the judge, whither all the men of the tribe would resort to hear the pleading and drink coffee. The shaikh himself would sit on a carpet spread on the ground at one end of the tent, leaning on a heap of cushions or a camel saddle. The disputants and spectators sat on carpets down both sides of the tent, facing one another.

Pleading would begin. A great bearded man, leaning forward in his eagerness and gesticulating with his cane towards the judge, would open by adjuring the shaikh to remember that God Himself was a witness of the discussion. "What do you say, O Ibn Jazi—and remember God, O Ibn Jazi!—to a poor man riding home on his camel, who was suddenly attacked by the son of his uncle . . ."

Now and again the other party, who kept half rising, pointing with his stick and showing other signs of impatience at the abominable allegations of his rival, would burst out with a shout: "It's not true"; "By Allah, where were you?"; "Who told you that?"—whereat the spectators would say soothingly: "Ayyan khair ya rejul—behave yourself, man—let him have his say—your turn will come to speak." Meanwhile the judge would be

huddled up on his cushions, probably drawing on the sand in front of him with his cane and appearing to be half asleep. Every now and again, however, he would look up and shoot a question at the speaker, which would leave him for a moment confused and stammering.

In all tribal trials the oath plays an important part, and more often than not witnesses are disregarded. The case will be decided by the accused swearing to his own innocence. I have frequently seen an accused man plead vehemently in his own defence, but in the end refuse to swear to his own innocence, where a single oath would have secured his acquittal. But this scrupulous refusal to swear to a lie becomes rarer as the tribes mix with non-bedouin communities.

Many ancient forms of oath survive, some of them probably thousands of years old, dating from long before Islam or even Christianity. The nomad's livelihood depends on grazing, and the commonest oath is by grass or bushes. Often a bedouin sitting on the ground in ordinary conversation will emphasize a statement by pulling up a piece of grass or breaking a twig from a bush and saying: "By the life of this twig . . ."

Religious instruction is eliminating these pagan forms and introducing oaths by God. "I swear by God than whom none is more glorious . . ." is perhaps the commonest formula. To demand that their opponent should swear would be too straightforward for a Huwaiti pleader, however, and he will shout: "I want six words, the first of them Allah and the last of them Allah . . ." for the formula in Arabic is "Wallah wa ma a'az min Allah . . ."

Even older perhaps than the oath is trial by ordeal. This has been eliminated in most Arabian tribes, partly by religious instruction and Wahhabi influence. It survives in a few backwaters such as the Huwaiti mountains. The commonest form is trial by fire or the "bisha'a." The right to administer this test is usually passed from father to son, and a small number of persons still practise the art. Only professional "mubeshas" are capable of carrying out the trial. The "mubesha" has a flat spoon, the size of half a crown. He sits on the ground in front of a fire and places the spoon in the heart of the embers. The accused sits beside him,

while the other parties and the witnesses sit round and watch. The heating of the spoon takes an interminable time, and the "mubesha" keeps taking it out of the fire red hot, looking at it, turning it over and putting it back, in front of the eyes of his victim. During this interval the "mubesha" talks continuously, expounding to the accused the certainty of the revelation of his guilt and the pain of burning. Meanwhile, he watches his face. At last the spoon is ready, the accused is required to put out his tongue, and the hot spoon is laid quickly upon it. An interval of some minutes is allowed, and then the accused is asked to put out his tongue once more. If he be guilty, his tongue will be blistered. If the tongue bears no mark, his innocence is established.

A more primitive superstitious rite could scarcely be imagined than this use of the "true light of God," as the Huwaitat call it. Nearly all the Arab Governments treat this process with contempt if not with righteous wrath. Yet I have found the process of immense value when working as a magistrate. The "mubeshas" will not, of course, consent to reveal the secrets of their hereditary art, but in many cases in which there were no witnesses, I have found the "bisha'a" identify the offender. I have always imagined that the "mubesha" takes the trouble to enquire into the case before it is referred to him, and to obtain a shrewd idea of the identity of the criminal. Then, during the intentionally prolonged process of heating the spoon, he talks continuously at the accused and watches his face closely. I am inclined to suspect that he then makes up his mind whether the accused is guilty or not, and presses the spoon on his tongue or touches it lightly according to the result which he wishes to produce.

In practice, more than half the accused persons who set out to lick the spoon lose their nerve while the spoon is in the fire, and voluntarily confess to their guilt without blistering their tongues. A further twenty-five per cent. probably blister their tongues, and twenty-five per cent. are declared innocent. The efficiency of the process depends, of course, entirely on the skill of the "mubesha." The days of the "true light of God" are doubtless numbered, and in the full glare of modern democracy and (doubtless) enlightenment, the little red-hot spoon will soon vanish. Before it does so, I cannot resist paying a tribute to the

skill of those who practise this infamous superstition, and to the considerable number of miscarriages of justice which were by this means avoided.

"The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world," writes Gibbon, "were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher as equally false; and by the magistrate as equally useful." Thus also the "bisha'a" was believed by the Huwaitat to be true, was denounced by the reformer as false, but to the magistrate was of considerable utility.

# X

## *Years of Peace*

“The land . . . is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven.”

DEUTERONOMY xi. 11.





## YEARS OF PEACE

I HAVE already devoted too many chapters to the desert. It was the country of which, in these early years, I had first-hand knowledge. Moreover, it was to play an important part in the later history of the Arab Legion. But it is time to emphasize that the Desert Patrol formed only one-fifth part of the strength of the Arab Legion from 1930 to 1936. The remaining four-fifths were the police and gendarmerie of the settled area of Trans-Jordan. I myself had originally come to Trans-Jordan to put an end to desert raiding. In doing so, I became a member of the Arab Legion. Within two years of my arrival, I found myself the second senior officer of the force, and its acting commander whenever Peake Pasha was absent. It was when acting for him while he was on leave that I gained my first knowledge of the settled agricultural portions of this arcadian land.

The settled area of Trans-Jordan consists of a single range of mountains, running north and south from the Syrian frontier to the head of the Gulf of Aqaba. On the west, this range falls precipitately 4,000 feet to the bed of the Jordan valley. On the east, the land slopes away gently from the summit of the mountains to the vast plateau of desert stretching hundreds of miles to the banks of the Euphrates.

The winter rains come to Trans-Jordan on the west wind from the Mediterranean. The moisture-laden clouds first strike the hills of Palestine, but if blown over these they sail high overhead across the deep trench of the Jordan valley and are stopped once more by the mountains of Trans-Jordan. The extreme northern end of the Trans-Jordan range is the Jebel Ajlun, the Gilead of the Old Testament. Farther south, and rising almost vertically out of the blue waters of the Dead Sea, is the Kerak district, the Biblical Moab, and on the extreme south, a tangle of wild cliffs and precipitous ravines, lies the ancient Edom, now the district

of Ma'an. The present capital of Amman is the Old Testament Ammon. On the glacis of the citadel above the modern town, Uriah the Hittite fell fighting in the forefront of the battle.

After the conquests of Alexander the Great, who died in 323 B.C., ten Greek cities, known as the Decapolis, were built in northern Trans-Jordan or southern Syria. One of these was the ancient Ammon, temporarily renamed Philadelphia by the Greeks. Jerash was another, under the Greek name of Gerasa. A third was Gadara above the southern end of the Sea of Galilee, where dwelt the owners of the Gadarene swine. Greek influence, however, remained confined to the northern half of what is now Trans-Jordan.

The Arab countries, in history as much as today, owe a great part of their importance to their geographical position—a half-way house and commercial exchange between India and the Far East on the one hand and Europe and the West on the other. Just as a chain of green gardens and fields marks the passage of an irrigation canal across the sands of the desert, so lines of cities and harbours have sprung up wherever this golden stream of commerce has flowed.

Two or three thousand years ago sea travel was not only precarious but also limited to a few months of the year. Merchants resorted to sea transport only where no other alternative was available, and wherever land communications permitted they unshipped their cargoes and continued their journey on *terra firma*. Three alternative routes have, as far back as we can trace, competed for the overland traffic of the East. Sometimes cargoes were unloaded on the Egyptian shore of the Gulf of Suez, or travelled the Egyptian canals to the Mediterranean. Sometimes vessels from India used the Persian Gulf, and the goods were carried overland from southern Iraq to the coast of the Mediterranean. This overland caravan traffic across the Syrian desert was in the third century A.D. to produce the city of Palmyra, which for a brief space aspired to compete with Rome and Byzantium as an Imperial capital.

But throughout the greater part of Roman times, Iraq was part of the rival empire of Persia, and the Romans gave as wide a berth as possible to their Imperial competitors. Indian mer-

chandise was brought to Aden or the Hadhramaut in southern Arabia, and conveyed on caravans of camels up the eastern shore of the Red Sea to the city of Petra in Trans-Jordan, the Port Said of Roman times. From the emporium of Petra the channel of commerce divided, some caravans going west to Egypt and others north to Syria. Defended on all sides by the wild hills and fantastic cliffs of southern Trans-Jordan, the city of Petra resisted both Greeks and Romans until the end of the first century, when it was absorbed into the Roman Empire. The Romans built a port at Aqaba, and laid a Roman road to it the whole way from Damascus. The fall of Petra could not stop the Indian trade, and in the seventh century Mecca had succeeded Petra as the caravan city which handled the camel-borne commerce from southern Arabia to Egypt and Damascus. The Prophet Muhamad himself engaged in this trade as a young man.

Ever since Old Testament times, the villagers of Trans-Jordan on their narrow line of hills have been menaced by the constant threat of attack by the nomads of the desert. Along or a little to the west of the present Hejaz Railway line may be traced the ruins of Bronze Age forts, the fortified camps of the Roman legions, and the high-walled castles built by the Turks. Only the early Arab khalifs of Muslim times and the Arab Legion of today have ventured to establish posts as far out in the desert as Bair and Juffer. At other times, the desert detour through Bair and Juffer has been far enough out to enable the traveller to avoid the authority of the settled rulers of Edom and Moab. The children of Israel, moving up from the wilderness to the Holy Land, watered at Bair before turning north-west towards Jericho. The Arabs of the twelfth century followed the same route to avoid the fortresses of the Crusaders, while T. E. Lawrence moved from Aqaba to Azraq by Juffer and Bair in order to miss the Turkish posts along the railway.

Just as the Arab League is regarded by the Palestine Zionists today as a menace to their continued existence, so the nightmare of the Crusaders of the twelfth century in Palestine was the union of Syria and Egypt. As long as these two Muslim states remained isolated, the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem was able to survive. To prevent their union, the Crusaders established the

principality of Outre-Jourdain, or Trans-Jordan, with its capital at Kerak. For a time the Syrians were able to maintain a precarious contact with Egypt by travelling down the desert to the east, but when the Crusaders occupied Aqaba the road between Arabia and Egypt was barred. The last Crusader Prince of Kerak was Renault de Chatillon, an unscrupulous adventurer, but a man of immense courage and initiative. He was not contented passively to bar the way between Arabia and Egypt, but resolved to carry the war into the enemy's country. He transported a fleet of ships overland from the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Aqaba, and sailed down the Red Sea to destroy the city of Mecca. The expedition was a failure, but Renault survived, and returned to Kerak to raid the caravans of pilgrims which travelled down the fringe of the desert from Damascus to Mecca. When the Crusader Kingdom collapsed at the battle of Hattin, Renault was taken prisoner by Saladin. He was put to death for his raids on the Muslim pilgrims during a period of truce.

The resident and the traveller in Trans-Jordan finds much to awake his interest and to stimulate any feeling he may have for history. The heaps of flint implements still to be found show that Trans-Jordan must have been an industrial area in the Stone Age. Every feature of the country speaks of Bible history—both Moses and Aaron are buried there. Every few miles that he travels, the observer will see Roman milestones or, still intact, stretches of the pavement of Trajan's road. He will stumble over fallen columns in a field of barley or see a Corinthian capital built into the wall of a cowshed.

If the visitor have no interest in history, he can scarcely be insensible to the magnificence of the scenery. The chain of mountains extends 200 miles from the Syrian frontier to the Gulf of Aqaba. Almost anywhere on this range, by ascending a hillock, the traveller can look down a 4,000-foot drop of tumbled ravines, woods and precipices to the dimly seen meandering Jordan far below. Or cantering across the green fields which cover the tops of the mountains near Kerak, he will see sparkling far beneath him the indescribably vivid blue of the Dead Sea. As a child, I used to picture the Dead Sea as a dreary waste of white salt, grey water and grey sand or stone. Few pictures could be farther from

the truth. The colour-effects of the Dead Sea are a joy which never palls. Not only is the water seen from above a gorgeous blue, but both sides of this narrow sea are bounded by vast mountain crags falling steeply into the water. Looking from the northern end the spectator sees promontory behind promontory thrusting out into the blue water, each rocky cape a different shade of pale misty blueness. At sunset the great rocky face of the Trans-Jordan range, rising out of the water, is changed to a vivid pink by the afterglow.

The rural population of Trans-Jordan has lost none of its rustic charm and simplicity, combined with the fantastic standards of generosity and hospitality which distinguish Arabs of all classes. It is impossible to remain unaffected by the touching gratitude of the villager for any help which he may receive. Once on a visit to Aqaba, I noticed a man whose half-whitened eyeballs showed that he must be nearly blind, while a watery discharge flowed from his eyes. I suggested that he visit the British Hospital of St. John in Jerusalem, and wrote a very brief note to the hospital to introduce him. On my next visit, the man ran to meet me with cries of welcome, covered my face and hands with kisses, and cried that I had saved his sight. His eyesight still seemed very dim, but the watery discharge had ceased. This incident occurred ten years ago, but never have I visited Aqaba since that time without being greeted by him with the same cries of welcome. Though extremely poor, he constantly presses me to come to his house for a banquet. If I excuse myself, he vanishes for a short time, only to return triumphantly with some pathetic little gift—a basket of dates, a dried fish or a quaint piece of coral from the gulf. This he secretes in the car, so that I shall find it as a surprise when I get home, or if I see him and ask what he is doing, he stands up challengingly and says: "It is a present. You must take it. You saved my eyes."

The hill country from Amman northwards is inhabited principally by villagers who live in little stone houses mud-plastered and whitewashed. In the steep valleys of Jebel Ajlun, the mountains of Gilead, these villages nestle in cracks in the hill-sides, amid tall straight poplars, between terraces of olive trees,

figs, apricot and vines. Outside the little whitewashed houses, peasant women sit cross-legged on terraces shaded with pergolas of vines. The tops of the mountains behind the villages are clothed with pine woods. Below the cottages the country falls away steeply in foothills, dotted with patches of ploughed land between outcrops of rock, to lines of pale-blue hills in the far distance.

The Jebel Ajlun had been administered by the Turks for forty years before the First World War began. Europeans often imagine that all this country belonged to Turkey for centuries. In practice the Turks exercised little or no control until about a hundred years ago. Before then, Arab chiefs and princes ruled the country, and waged war on one another, according only the most nominal allegiance to the Sultan. After the Crimean War, the movement for modernization began in Turkey, and some attempt was made to extend the authority of the Government over the various areas where the Sultan nominally held sway. From Damascus, administration gradually spread to Ajlun, but it did not reach as far south as Amman until the last decade of the nineteenth century. The southern part of Trans-Jordan was scarcely administered when the World War began in 1914.

The resistance of the villagers of Ajlun had, however, been broken. The Turkish gendarmerie employed methods of its own. When a visit from these representatives of law and order was expected, as many villagers as could escape slipped out to the hills or the vineyards. The gendarmerie rode into the village with much clatter and shouting, and the officer dismounted before the guest-house. Carpets, quilts and cushions must be brought at speed, or a few cuts with the whip and blows with the butt of a rifle served to remind the dilatory host of his duties. If a serious crime were to be investigated, the next step was to bring the headmen of the village, or other likely-looking fellows, throw them down on their faces and flog them. The form of beating employed was usually the *bastinado*; the legs were tied together, the man lying on his face, knees bent, with the soles of his feet upwards. Only when an adequate number of people had been flogged did the officer bring out his pencil and paper to begin the investigations.

The preliminary flogging had persuaded the villagers that

serious business was on hand and that the Government was not to be trifled with—or that at least was the theory. The principle on which the gendarmerie acted was that nothing was secret in an Arab village, and that if a crime had been committed, somebody, if not everybody, in the village must know who had done it. If the troops behaved in a high-handed manner, somebody would eventually break down and tell them the truth.

The police investigations having been successfully concluded by a full and free confession on the part of one of the victims of the bastinado, the next item in the visit was lunch. The gendarmerie were no bashful guests, and instructions had already been given to the village headmen as to the numbers of lambs, chickens, eggs and other delicacies which were to be prepared. If the villagers had failed to confess, or perhaps if the officer was out of humour, the whole lunch might be overturned on the floor, and the host instructed to begin again and serve a better meal. Such conduct gave the peasants some idea of the power and importance of the Government and of the inadvisability of trifling with the Sultan's officers.

Yet with all this, a gendarme's life was not always an easy one. The Turkish Government might maintain an Army Corps in the big cities like Baghdad or Damascus, but these were not much support to small detachments of gendarmerie in remote tribal districts. Sometimes the people turned on them and killed them. Often they maintained their position precariously, as much by bluff as by force. In the Arab countries, the majority of the rank and file of the gendarmerie were Arabs, with an occasional Turk, Kurd or Albanian. Even the junior officers were Arabs. Thus the methods employed were not dictated by the contempt of a conquering race for subject peoples. Indeed, the Turks in the old days had little racial bias of the kind with which we have become recently so familiar in Europe. All Turkish subjects were Ottomans (irrespective of whether they were by origin Turks, Arabs or Kurds), and Arabs rose to be generals in the army and viziers of the Sultan.

The use of force can nearly always be justified by immediate results. The gendarmerie elicited many confessions by flogging. Where gentler or more orthodox methods were employed, the



criminals went undetected. It was but natural that the gendarmes should reach the conclusion that the use of violence was the only method of enforcing Government authority.

The Government, however, was not always the villain of the piece. That many of the villagers were able to defend themselves is illustrated by the story of the horse which had eggs for breakfast.

A certain large Arab village was the seat of a mudir, the most junior category of administrative official. The village had a bad reputation amongst Government officers. Whenever a new mudir was appointed, the villagers set themselves to spy upon or provoke him. Should he make the least mistake or be guilty of the slightest misconduct, the fact was exaggerated ten-fold. Petitions were collected, and deputations set out to complain to the Governor of the province or even to Constantinople itself.

One day a new mudir arrived at Humeira. His predecessor had been removed from office as a result of the complaints of the villagers, who set themselves with enthusiasm to ruin his successor. But the new mudir was a man of different mettle. He performed his duties punctiliously, was polite and urbane to all, steadfastly rejected bribes and improved the standard of public security. The villagers were at a loss to find material for a complaint.

At last, however, the mudir bought a horse and engaged a village youth as groom. This innocent, and indeed desirable, action was to prove his undoing. At the instigation of the villagers, the groom began to give the horse raw eggs with his barley. Gradually the barley was reduced and the eggs increased, until the horse acquired a taste for them.

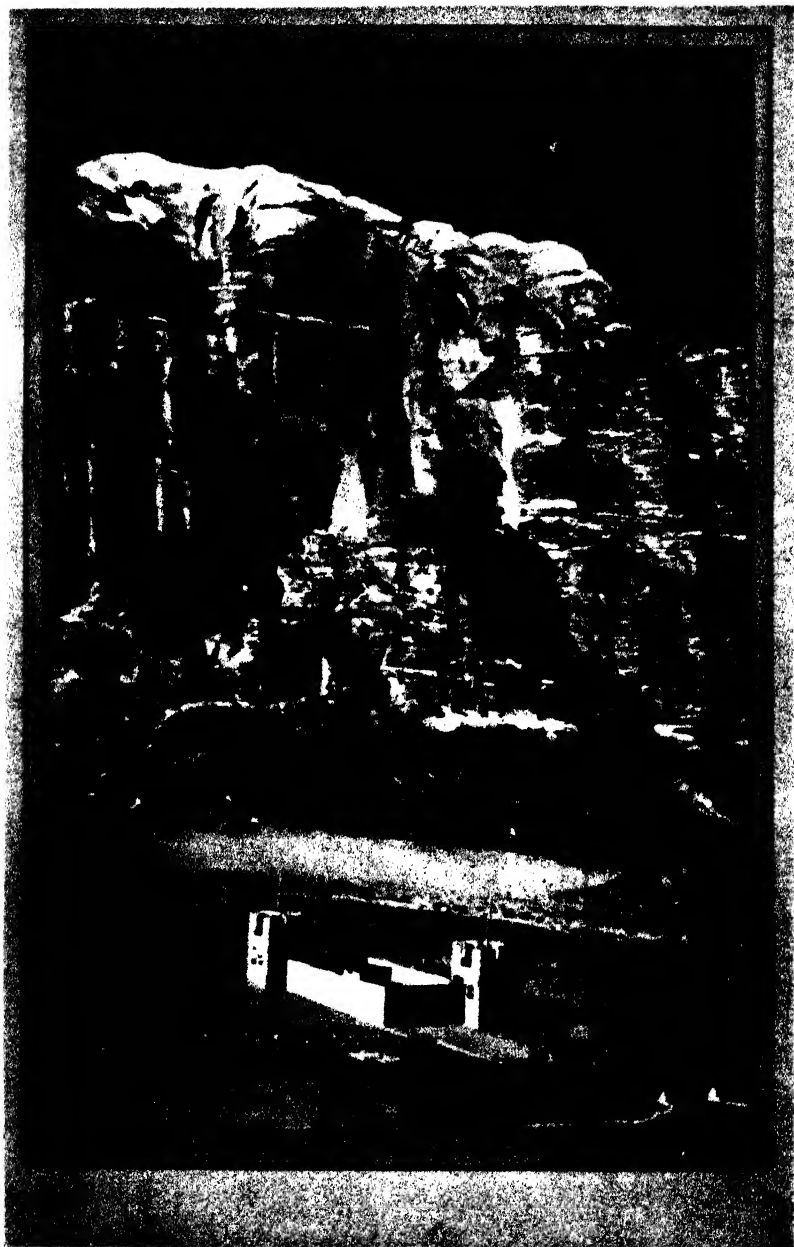
Then the petition was at last prepared. A vast number of false seals and thumb-impressions were affixed to it. A deputation was appointed, and in view of the importance of the issue, decided to avoid the local pasha and to lay their misfortune before the Sublime Porte itself.

Their vociferous wailings drew the attention of the authorities, and the deputation was ushered into the presence of the Sultan's principal minister. They threw themselves at his feet, with loud cries for mercy and for justice. His Excellency enquired the cause of their misfortunes, and was told that the oppression, the rapacity and the cruelty of the Mudir of Humeira were no longer to be



**SAHAB SALAR JUNG BAHADUR**  
The gendarmerie of Trans-Jordan

*Imperial War Museum*



Desert Fort at Rum

borne. "What does he do?" enquired the vizier. "One example will suffice," moaned the deputation. "Our wives and children can no longer procure eggs. All the fresh eggs in the village are reserved for the breakfast of the mudir's horse."

The vizier was greatly struck by this astounding example of oppression, and a committee of enquiry was immediately appointed. The members of the committee included several senior officers, who were given full power to take such summary action as the situation demanded. They travelled back to the village with the deputation of plaintiffs. The mudir received them with confidence and urbanity, relying on the clearness of his conscience. Next morning, to his surprise, the committee of enquiry paid a visit to the stables at an early hour. They had scarcely reached the stall occupied by the mudir's horse, when the groom appeared with a basket of fresh eggs. No one was more surprised than the mudir himself, who had never before visited the stables at breakfast-time. The horse whinnied loudly when he saw the groom approaching, and devoured the eggs eagerly when they were placed in the manger. The committee of enquiry was horrified at the mudir's rapacity, which seemed to them unequalled, even in the long annals of the Turkish Empire. The mudir was placed under arrest, and despatched to Constantinople under a military guard to suffer the punishment of his crimes.

Whether or not this story be true, it contains a useful lesson. Misgovernment corrupts the ruled as much as the rulers. There was little affection and co-operation between the villagers and the Government in Turkish days. The Arab Government of Trans-Jordan found that the peasants still regarded it as an enemy. A generation had to pass away before the village people came to regard the Arab Legion as their own, not as the instrument of a distant, hostile power. In the end many factors combined to bring a better state of feeling. The new village schools taught the peasants more about their land and rulers. The gendarmerie itself was chiefly recruited from the villages. Finally, any incidents of the use of violence by gendarmes were severely punished, and the officers themselves made a practice of paying social visits to village headmen. Thus grew up all over the country a new spirit,

which was to be triumphantly vindicated in the troublous years to come. The villagers at last came to regard the Government, not with suspicion and fear, but with affection and confidence. The Press and the politicians are inclined to ask about the composition of the Parliament, the electoral law or the powers of the Sovereign. The uniform and unwavering loyalty of the peasants and tribesmen of Trans-Jordan is more eloquent than a volume of constitutions and white papers.

A great part of this happy spirit was due to the personality of His Highness the Amir (now King) Abdulla of Trans-Jordan. For he knew at first-hand the lives of all his subjects, the bedouins and the villagers as much as the wealthy merchants and the Government officers. On camel-back or horseback or by car, he toured his country frequently, not disdaining to sleep in villages, under canvas or in nomadic tents. He practised that accessibility to all classes of his subjects which was in the great tradition of Arab sovereigns, but which had fallen into sad disuse under the rule of Turkish pashas.

But the influence of one individual, no matter how accessible he made himself, could not establish personal contact with more than a small percentage of the population. To the majority of the people of Trans-Jordan, the gendarmerie post nearest to their home was the real representative of the Government.

Scattered far and wide over the country, on the banks of the Jordan 1,500 feet below sea-level—in the pinewoods of Jebel Ajlun—in the centre of the villages and terraced vineyards of Gilead and in the arid mountains of Petra, little posts of a sergeant and seven or eight gendarmes played a lone hand amid thousands of villagers or tribesmen. Most of the gendarmerie forts were similar in design. On a piece of rising ground, commanding a view of the surrounding country, stood a little fort with crenellated towers and pierced with loopholes. The flag flew from a flag-staff on the tower above the gate.

The outside wall of the fort was pierced only with loopholes, but the main gate led into a central courtyard, containing a tree or two and some beds of flowers. The stable, the barrack-room, the office, the kitchen and the other rooms of the fort were immaculately whitewashed and tidy.

Today all the men of the gendarmerie have to be educated at least to primary-school standards, enabling them neatly to keep the files and registers in the office of the fort. But all are countrymen, the sons of village headmen or prosperous farmers. Much of their value, indeed, depends on their rural upbringing, for although a man is not allowed to serve in his own district, he can, nevertheless, gain the friendship and confidence of the village people as being one of themselves. They are essentially farmers amongst farmers.

The fort is, indeed, clean and comfortable, but the gendarmerie trooper spends little of his time between its walls. A great part of every day he passes in the saddle. Nothing seems to be outside the scope of his duties. The arrest of criminals and the patrolling of the roads are perhaps his primary duties. Delivering summonses from the Law Courts means many long hours on horseback. Enumerating flocks of sheep for taxation, escorting tax collectors and pursuing smugglers are part of the daily routine. The basis of government procedure in rural districts seems to be: "When in doubt send for the gendarmerie." If clouds of locusts descend on the crops, the gendarmerie will organize counter-measures. If there is a gang working on the roads, a gendarme will keep an eye on the job. If a car is bogged by the winter rains, the gendarmerie will rescue the occupants and put them up at the fort for the night. If the village children have an epidemic or the cattle foot-and-mouth disease, the sergeant at the fort will know what to do. To them might be applied Rudyard Kipling's saying about the Royal Engineers—"We are the men who do something all round."

While engaged in all these unending activities, the rural gendarmerie are constantly mixing with the country people. They are the villagers' newspaper, the interpreters of the policy of the Government and of the benevolence of the Sovereign. If the Department of Education wants the villagers to build a school or the Agricultural Officer wishes to introduce a new kind of seed, the gendarmerie will persuade the farmers to take it up.

As time goes on, the village people are becoming more educated. The troopers are highly disciplined, and trained in law and police work. But the gendarme is still the universal guide, philosopher and friend. From 1936 to 1939, while Palestine was in the anarchy

of the Arab rebellion, and through nearly six years of war while the whole world was in convulsion, the peaceful countryside of Trans-Jordan was undisturbed by so much as a breath of civil discord. The whole strength of Trans-Jordan was directed to the raising of military forces and their despatch to other countries beyond the boundaries of their country, to join in the war effort of Britain and the Allies. Not one soldier was diverted from war service to ensure the maintenance of internal order. The greater part of the credit for this notable record must be given to the stalwart farmer-soldiers of the gendarmerie, whose quiet wisdom and unquestioning loyalty enabled them to hold the moral leadership of the farmers and the tribesmen through ten long years of trouble, anxiety and fear from 1936 to 1946.

The distinctive Arab Legion contribution to this system was the abandonment of violence and flogging, and their replacement by moral leadership. In the days of the Turks, the gendarmerie had always formed the foundation of the administration. To the ignorant, illiterate peasant of the Turkish Empire, the sergeant of gendarmerie seemed to be almost an emperor in his own right. The story of the Wali of Baghdad, known all over the northern Arab countries, is eloquent of the position of the gendarmerie in Turkish times.

A new Wali of Baghdad had been appointed in Constantinople, and was travelling slowly overland to Baghdad, for it was before the days of trains or cars. The Wali was a man of considerable eminence in the Turkish Empire, equivalent perhaps to the Governor-General of one of the great Dominions of the British Commonwealth. He was accompanied by a considerable retinue and a whole regiment of cavalry as escort. One evening the caravan halted and camp was pitched for the night. It was early summer, and the green crops were standing knee deep in the fields. Some troopers of the cavalry turned their horses into a field of green wheat to graze. The owner of the field came running up to protest, but the troopers cursed him. "You son of a dog," shouted one of the soldiers, striking the peasant with a horse-whip. "Don't you know these are the pasha's horses?"

It so happened that the Wali himself heard the noise and looked out of his tent. He gave orders for the soldiers to be arrested and

punished and the horses removed from the crops. The poor peasant, still smarting under his beating, could scarcely grasp what had happened, until one of the servants whispered in his ear: "Go and kiss the pasha's hand, you son of accursed parents." The fellah threw himself on the ground and embraced the knees of his benefactor.

"May God prolong your life, O Pasha!" he roared. "You are the father of the poor! May God exalt you to yet higher rank! Some day, if God wills, may you rise to be a sergeant in the gendarmerie!"

The creator of the Arab Legion, first as a military force and then as a gendarmerie, was Peake Pasha. He had been assisted in his task by a small number of devoted Arab officers, most of whom had been previously in the Turkish Army. Many years after the time of which I am now writing, a senior British officer said to me that the best-disciplined troops in the Middle East were the British Brigade of Guards and the Arab Legion. It would be difficult to decide what proportion of the credit for this high standard was due to the personality of Peake Pasha and what to the proud military traditions of the Turks.

Several Arab officers trained under the Turkish Empire became intimately known to me. From them I learned how extremely high, if perhaps rigid, was the discipline of the Imperial Turkish Army before 1914. Slackness, slovenly dress and, above all, lack of respect for a military superior were to them anathema. No officer amongst them would sit in the presence of his superior. Still less would he unbutton his jacket or take off his hat. But their military standards were not limited to correctness of dress or deportment. To them orders were sacred, grumbling or criticism was unknown. Much of that military pride which carried the Arab Legion through the dark days of 1940-41 was derived from the rigid military spirit of the old Turkish Empire.

Peake Pasha was for seventeen years the commander of the Arab Legion. Originally a regular officer in the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, he had joined the Egyptian Army Camel Corps before 1914. In 1915 he had taken part with the Camel Corps in the Darfur expedition. This little campaign might in peace-time



have secured some publicity, but it passed unnoticed amidst the clamour and anguish of the great battles in France and Flanders. Falling from his camel in the Sudan, he "broke" his neck, and performed the long journey down the Nile to Cairo lying motionless on his back.

Peake never saw service on any of the main fronts in the First World War, but he was not without adventures. Torpedoed off Alexandria, he jumped overboard with a packet of sandwiches and a bottle of beer and was picked up by a destroyer. Disappointed at spending the war in Egypt, he absconded when on leave and made his way to Salonika, where he persuaded an Air Force unit to accept him, and flew regularly over the enemy's lines as an observer, until his whereabouts was discovered and he was summarily sent back to his unit. The sense of humour of General Sir George Milne alone saved him from a court martial for an offence the penalty of which in war-time was death.

When the Amir Feisal and the Arab Army reached Aqaba, Peake's company of the Egyptian Camel Corps was sent to join him, and he took part in all the operations of the Arab army from Aqaba to the final advance in November 1918. Lawrence refers to him in the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* as persuading his Egyptians to advance by reckless exposure of his own person. After the war, he returned once more for a short time to Egypt, but with the creation of the Trans-Jordan Government he was sent up to raise an army for the Amir Abdulla. His adventures were by no means ended, for the country was in chaos. He was seized by an angry mob in the town of Amman itself, and carried to the public square, where he would probably have been hanged then and there if an Arab officer had not dashed forward at no small risk and rescued him. On another occasion he was captured by men of a hostile tribe, who spent two hours debating in his hearing whether or not they would put him to death. He was kidnapped by the Shaikh of the Beni Sakhr, and spent the night locked up in a stable—but the catalogue of his adventures would require a volume to narrate.

Above the average height, erect in carriage, his complexion tended to be rubicund, a colour further intensified by his hair and moustache which, when I knew him, were turning white.

He affected an Edwardian, if not a Victorian, military style. The Staff Officers of the Arab Legion wore at this time a blue patrol jacket, blue overalls and Wellingtons. The other officers had a single wide red stripe down their overalls, but the Pasha had a triple stripe. Thus clad, and with a high black lambskin cap and a stout malacca stick, he could be seen daily striding through the town of Amman to his office. He never failed to change for dinner (he was a bachelor at this time), and dined every night in solitary state.

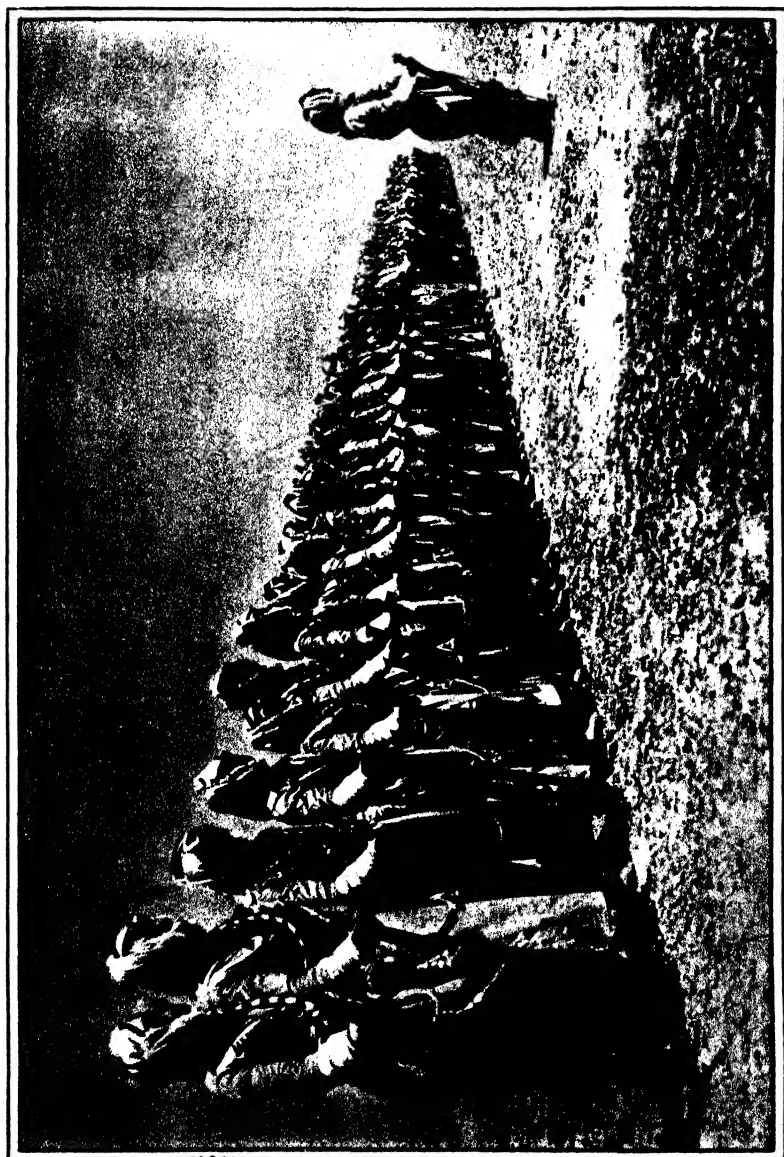
Peake believed, or claimed to believe, that it was often good policy to appear to be angry. Those who had served long on his staff claimed that they could tell his mood by the morning tilt of his lambskin cap. If it was on the back of his head, the day would be fair. If it were tipped forward on his nose, the worst was to be anticipated. But whatever his initial mood, a storm would invariably be produced should anyone enter the office smelling of onions—not to mention garlic. The staff of Arab Legion Headquarters was denied the use of this flavouring, so extensively employed in Arab cooking. For so sensitive were his nostrils to the aroma of garlic, that Peake could immediately locate anybody who had indulged in that vegetable during the previous three days.

When the Pasha was on tour, the warning code word "Thundercloud" would be passed from post to post across the desert and mountains, and feverish polishings and sweepings would ensue. He was fully aware both of his code name and of its effect. But in spite of his rages, real or assumed, Peake held despotic sway over the hearts of the men of the Arab Legion. To them, he was the centre of the universe. When Trans-Jordan first embarked on the road of democracy, the rise and fall of cabinets were perplexing to the rural population. After one cabinet crisis, a bus from the capital was halted in a country village. A bystander asked the news. "The Government has fallen," said one of the passengers arrived from Amman. But a man of the Arab Legion overheard this statement and could not control his indignation. "It's a lie!" he cried. "How could the Government fall when Peake Pasha is there?"

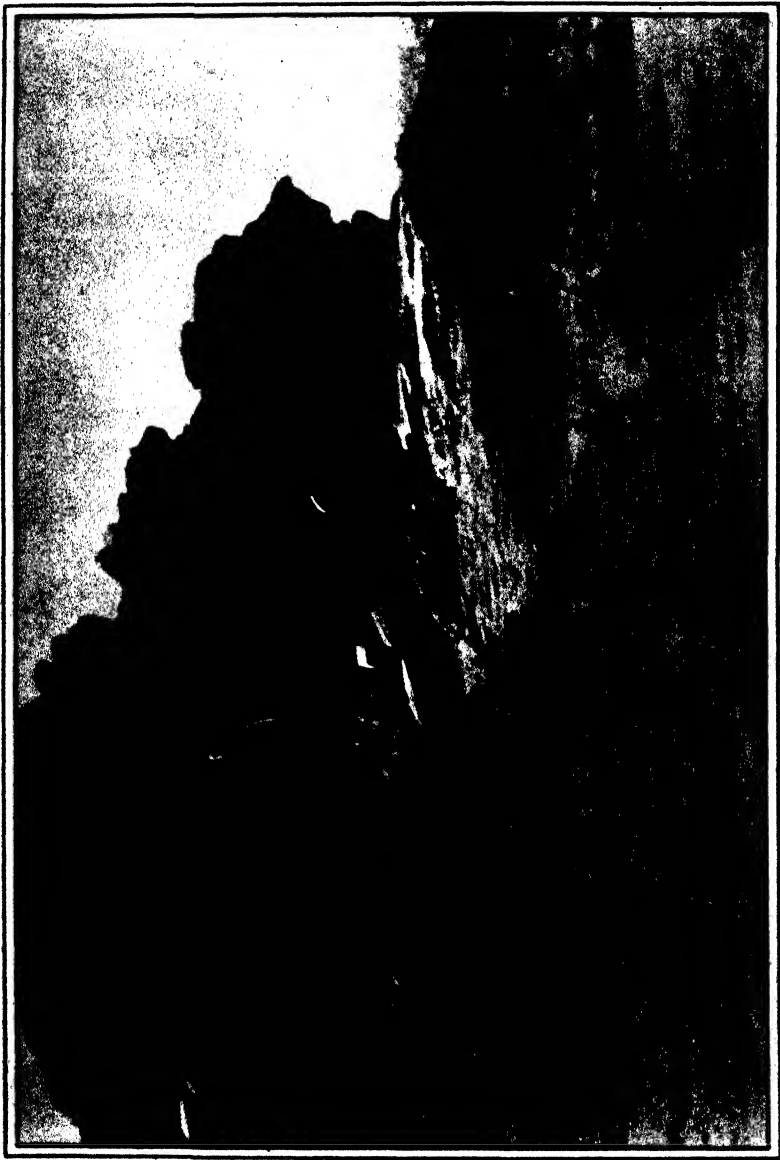
Of his courage there could be no doubt. He learnt to fly at the

age of fifty, and thereafter always flew his own aircraft. In spite of his strict and rigid military manner, his heart was as simple and kind as that of the village maiden of tradition. How often in the eight years since he left us have officers or men said to me: "Peake Pasha—God bless him!—his heart was simple." When I was far out in the desert, he would fly out to me alone in his little aircraft. When he had landed, he would drag a large parcel from the rear locker. It would contain half a dozen apples, a loaf of white bread, a pair of socks, a roll of illustrated papers—little luxuries which a fond mother might have thought of for her son.

In some ways Peake was a complex of contradictions. He seemed deliberately to assume the dress and manners of the Victorians—and yet he learned to fly his own aeroplane at fifty. He flew into violent rages, yet he thought out little presents for his friends with the solicitude of a woman. However we may sum up his character or his qualities, one thing we may say for him—perhaps the thing he himself would have liked to hear more than all praise. It was he who created the Arab Legion, the officers and men of which still say, when they mention his name: "May Allah remember him for good!"



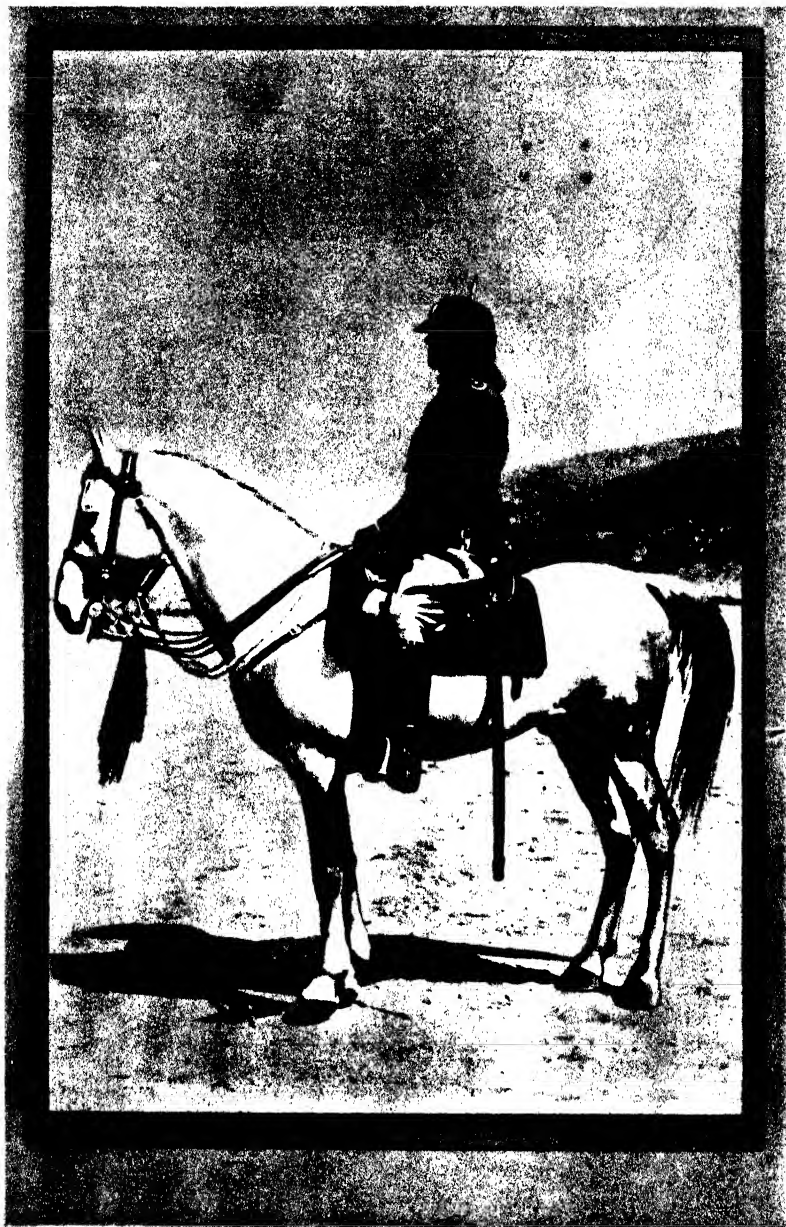
NEWAB SALAR JUNG BAHADUR



Desert Patrol, 1932



United States 1015



Peake Pasha, for seventeen years Commander of  
the Arab Legion

# XI

## *Desert Diplomacy*

“For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.”

I CORINTHIANS ix. 19.





## DESERT DIPLOMACY

**T**HE Desert Area contained only one-seventh of the inhabitants of Trans-Jordan, but three-fifths of the frontiers of the country fell within it. The length of frontier for the security of which I was responsible amounted to about 700 miles. This included the whole frontier with Saudi Arabia and with Iraq, and 150 out of 200 miles of the frontier with Syria. In 1930 unceasing and almost uncontrolled raiding was going on, across both the Saudi Arabian and the Syrian frontiers. In dealing with her neighbours, Trans-Jordan was handicapped by the fact that her own tribes were largely out of control, a condition which existed equally in Syria. Our first task was, therefore, to establish complete control over our own tribes. We were obliged to postpone diplomatic negotiations until we could be perfectly certain of our power to enforce on our own tribes compliance with the terms of any treaty which we might subsequently conclude with our neighbours.

It was, however, equally true that internal conditions in Trans-Jordan could never be really quiet and happy unless her relations with her neighbours could be made reasonably friendly. The shape of the country was long and narrow, and raiders from beyond the borders could, therefore, reach nearly every part of it. In a similar way, persons who committed crimes inside the country were often able to escape across a frontier before they could be arrested. Thus the complement of the establishment of internal control was the attainment of a working understanding with our neighbours.

On a higher level, relations were, of course, controlled by Cabinets and Foreign Offices. But the incidents handled by the diplomats had hitherto found their origin in the raids and shootings of the tribesmen. Such incidents had been greatly reduced in number, but it was not possible to guarantee that no

crime of the kind would ever occur again. The second step in the task of desert pacification was, therefore, to reach some understanding with our neighbours, so that such cases could be settled direct between us without recourse to the tardy and cumbersome action of diplomacy.

The two administrations with which we were principally concerned offered a striking contrast to one another. On the south and east of our desert area lay the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the land of the Wahhabis. These pious Muslims not only drank no alcohol but to them tobacco, silk and music were equally denounced as worldly abominations.

On the north our frontier marched with Syria, which at that time was under French administration. Liaison with the French meant drinking champagne in the morning and the rather sordid gaieties of the cabarets of Beyrout and Damascus at night. To be equally at home with the puritan warriors of Arabia and in the company of the French of Damascus required a certain degree of adaptability.

By the spring of 1932 we were in complete control of our own tribes on the Saudi frontier, and in March of that year a Trans-Jordan deputation left for Jedda to discuss the conclusion of a Treaty of *Bon Voisinage* with Saudi Arabia. The deputation was led by the British Resident, Lieutenant-Colonel (later Sir Henry) Cox, the Trans-Jordan member being Taufiq Pasha abu al Huda. I accompanied the party as technical adviser.

I had visited Jedda four years previously on a somewhat similar mission, but on that occasion I had formed part of a mission representing Iraq, under the pleasant and courteous leadership of the late Sir Gilbert Clayton. On both occasions we stayed as guests of the Saudi Government at Kundara, a large house on a sandy plain outside the walls of the town. On the first occasion, the King paid us frequent informal visits in the afternoon at tea-time. He would arrive in a large limousine car, with negro slaves standing on the running-board on both sides. Special metal rings had been fitted on the outside of the doors of the car for them to hold. As the big car drew up to the front steps of the house, slaves jumped off the Royal car and the escorting cars in front of and behind it, and vanished into the house, while others

lined the steps. His Majesty would tuck up his feet beneath him on the sofa in the sitting-room and talk pleasantly and unrestrainedly of the world at large, the beauty of women, famous men or the unpleasant climate of Jedda.

Once Sir Gilbert Clayton asked the King who was the greatest Englishman he had ever met. His Majesty had received many famous and important Englishmen in his time, but he replied without a moment's hesitation—"Captain Shakespeare." Shakespeare was in the Persian Gulf political service before 1914, and had already ridden across the then almost unexplored Arabian peninsula by camel. When war broke out, he was sent on a mission to Ibn Saud, to urge him to attack his rival, Ibn Rasheed, who had declared for the Turks. His mission was successful; Ibn Saud took the field and a pitched battle ensued between the two princes at Jerab. During the engagement Shakespeare was killed. Fourteen years later, the Arab King unhesitatingly pronounced him the greatest of his compatriots.

I had a private audience with the King on this first visit, in the informal atmosphere of a little room at the top of the house he was then occupying in Jedda. Several royal children were playing in the room, and we limited the conversation to bedouin matters, sheep and camels, grazing and deserts, my familiarity with which I was perhaps too anxious to exhibit.

Whether this cordial and unconventional atmosphere was due to the King's friendship for our leader, Sir Gilbert Clayton, I do not know, for on the second visit the atmosphere was different. We saw the King only once, at a formal audience in the throne-room of a new palace which had been built since our former visit.

In 1932 a Saudi delegation came to Jerusalem, and the *Bon Voisinage* Treaty was signed. It inaugurated a new era between the two countries, which up till then had been divided by intense bitterness. From the Arab Legion point of view, the most interesting clause was that by which the two Governments agreed to appoint frontier inspectors, who were empowered to meet from time to time on the frontier to settle current questions. Should the frontier inspectors fail to agree on any matter, it would be referred to their respective Governments. Ever since the *Bon*

*Voisinage* Treaty was signed, I have had the honour to represent the Trans-Jordan Government as their frontier inspector. Fourteen eventful years have passed since this treaty was concluded, yet throughout this time no question within our competence has been referred by us to our Governments owing to our inability to agree.

The first Saudi nominee for the post of frontier inspector was the Amir Abdul Aziz ibn Zeid, a man, probably slightly older than myself, who had formerly been in the service of Ibn Rasheed. He might be described as a professional Government official, and a devoted and truthful servant of his master.

The Saudi Government was doubtful of its consent to the first meeting between Ibn Zeid and myself, and it stipulated that it would agree only if it were understood that the two inspectors were to meet on terms of complete equality. The stipulation said little for their opinion of my manners. The first meeting was, however, a success and the forerunner of many more of its kind.

Negotiations between the two Governments in the past had been characterized by much bitterness, both sides putting forward enormous claims and neither consenting to give way. No previous frontier negotiation had ever led to any result except increased friction. It was with some anxiety that I deliberated, before this first meeting, what course I was to follow. In all the difficulties of my life in Arabia, I have met with success when I have appealed to Arab honour. I decided on this occasion to follow the same course.

A number of disputes were to be discussed at this first meeting, although I have forgotten the details of them now. When, however, they were read out, instead of demanding restitution or compensation for my Government, I told my colleague that I knew him to be a man of honour and experience, and I begged him to decide the answers to these cases. Perhaps he had expected me to argue or shout, and was himself determined to defend his rights. My prior agreement to any decision he reached was perhaps unexpected. At any rate, he deprecated it and announced his inability to come to unilateral decisions. I forget what it was all about now, so trivial a few years later do those problems become which at the time seem to be immensely important and

harassing. In any case, the ice was broken, and we parted, not only pleased with our diplomatic début, but united by a personal friendship which continues to this day.

Other Saudi frontier inspectors followed Ibn Zeid, of whom the most outstanding were the Princes of the Sudairi family. They were cousins of the King, on his mother's side. To the Amir Abdulla as Sudairi I was deeply attached, until his elevation to the Governorship of Medina removed him to a higher sphere. He was succeeded by the Amir Abdul Aziz as Sudairi.

In our frontier meetings, we followed a fixed ritual which we had ourselves invented and from which we never departed. We took it in turns to be host, the meetings usually taking place within a few miles of the frontier on one side or the other. The host would pitch a camp of white tents, including one for the visiting frontier inspector to sleep in, one spread with carpets and cushions for our joint meetings, one for eating, and a considerable number of other tents for the retainers, escort, car drivers and menials of the visiting delegation.

If we were hosts, I would spend the previous twenty-four hours preparing the camp site. On the morning of the appointed day, the duties of all ranks were allotted to them. After a few years, the men of the Desert Patrol became well practised at these entertainments. Some were detailed to make tea and others coffee. The method of carrying in the tray of tea-cups, and even more of pouring the tiny cups of coffee, was carefully regulated. Others held the jugs and basins for hand washing, yet others soap or towels, while two men sprayed the guests with eau de Cologne. In later years the same technique was further elaborated in the case of visits by many other distinguished persons. On one occasion we even entertained a party of French officers from Syria to lunch in a tented camp *à l'arabe*. They were surprised and perhaps interested, although their enjoyment was lessened by the fact that they arrived in tight breeches, boots and spurs, and suffered acute pins and needles when invited to sit on carpets on the ground.

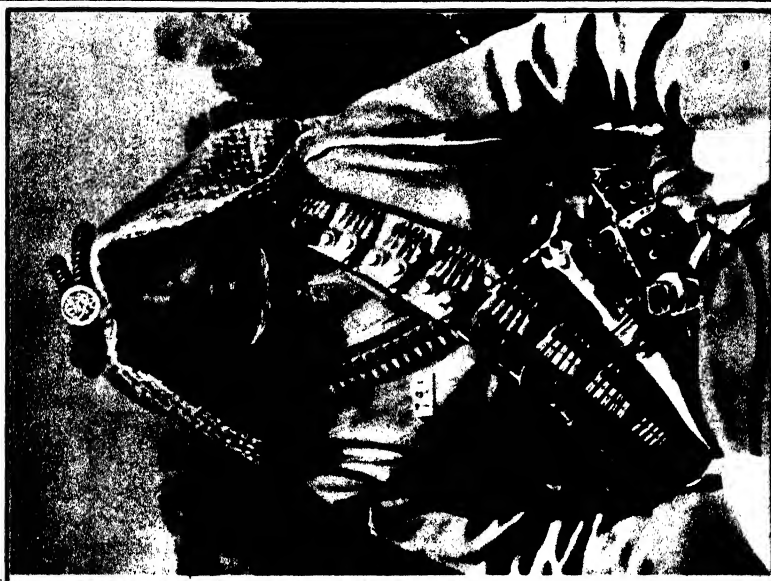
The Saudi delegations usually arrived before sunset. When all was ready, we would post a look-out man to watch for dust coming across the desert. At last a small puff of dust would become visible

in the distance, gradually increasing in size until it broke into three or four separate dust-clouds, each following a little black moving speck. Perhaps as the cars approached the sun would sink behind the desert horizon, and soon the whole sky would become covered with flecks of scarlet cloud, melting in the west to gold, while in the east the night advanced across the desert from a sky of dark purple.

The guests would arrive, alight from their cars and shake hands with the slow and quiet dignity and poise of the old Arab world. The Sudairis possessed that quality of natural ease and good manners which had been such a marked feature of the Amir Shakir. Meanwhile the reception tent was bright with the white light of the hissing pressure petrol lamps. We sat round on bright carpets and cushions spread on the ground, the Amir and his retainers and myself. The retainers were dressed in cloaks edged with gold thread, and wore curved swords in scabbards of gold and silver. We expressed the polite hope that His Excellency had not been tired by the journey. Meanwhile the coffee-men appeared, in their gay Desert Patrol uniforms, with khaki robes, scarlet sashes and scarlet revolver lanyards. Two coffee-men advanced side by side, each holding a shining brass coffee-pot in the right hand and a pile of little coffee-cups in the left. The two coffee-men poured out simultaneously to the Amir and myself. Then followed tea, and a little polite conversation on the subject of the weather, before we withdrew to allow the guests to wash and pray the sunset prayer.

Dinner was in the old Arab style, and consisted of a heaped mountain of rice, surmounted by five sheep roasted whole. Each sheep was filled with savoury stuffing and hard-boiled eggs, while the whole contents of the dish was sprinkled with almonds, raisins and other sundries. It took ten stout men to carry the great dish from the kitchen tent, amid much staggering and shuffling of feet, and pauses for rests. This central *pièce de résistance* was placed on the floor in the centre of the dining-tent. Around it were grouped a hundred small plates containing many different varieties of meat, vegetables, sauces, chicken, buttermilk and other delicacies.

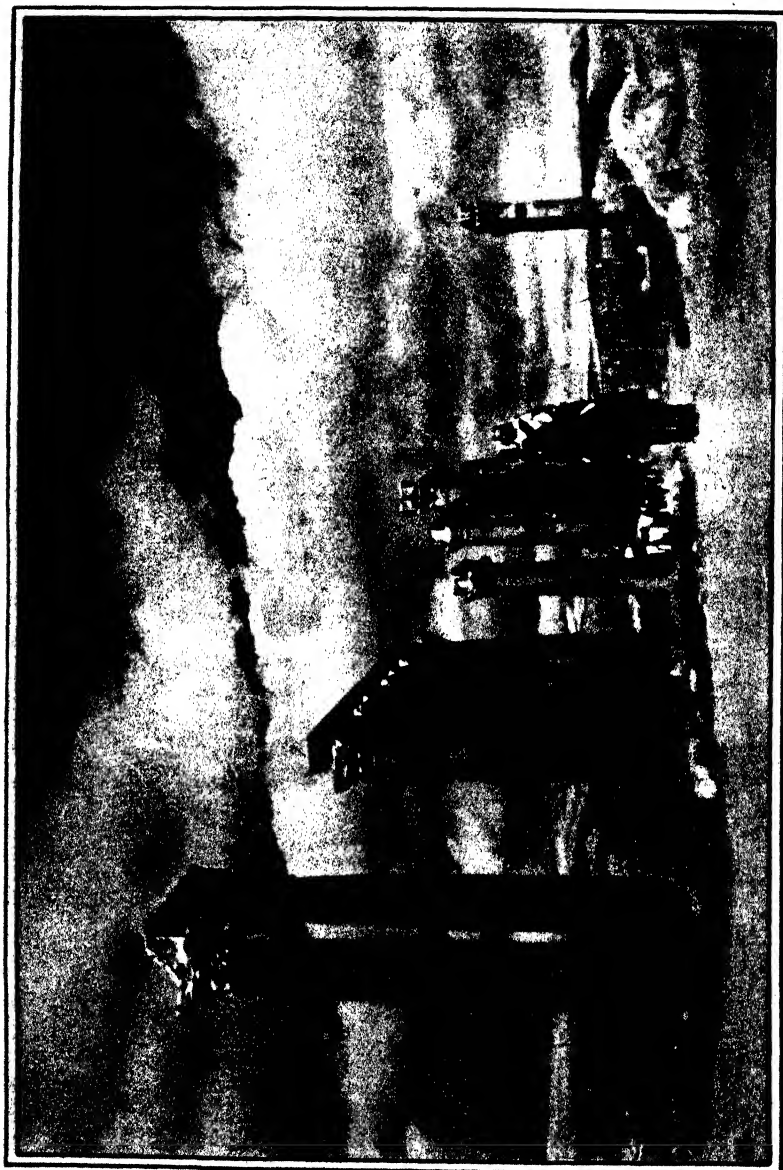
When all was ready, I walked across the dark space between



THE FOLLOWING ARE THE NAMES OF THE SOLDIERS WHO WERE KILLED IN THE BATTLE OF THE MARITIME PROVINCES

THESE SOLDIERS WERE





Frank Harley

the tents to where the Saudi party was sitting in the reception tent in the glaring white light of the petrol lamps. "Does Your Excellency order dinner?" or "Will you honour us by coming this way?" we enquire. According to the extravagant Arab code of hospitality, the host, no matter what his rank, must remain standing in the place of a servant while his guests sit at meat. But the custom established between us and the Saudis allows the host to dine with the visiting delegation. I sat on the floor with the Amir. With eight or ten of his principal retainers, we formed a circle round the dish. Three or four men of the Desert Patrol leaned over us, whipped out their silver daggers and slashed the carcasses of the five roast sheep, so that the guests might help themselves the more easily. Murmuring "In the name of God," we began to eat. Every now and then we would push a new delicacy in front of the Amir, murmuring "Does Your Excellency order some chicken?" or "Will you eat some tomato?" A stalwart member of the Desert Patrol, with a pointed beard and his hair done in long ringlets on either side of his face, proclaimed in stentorian tones: "O most blessed hour, which has shown us the faces of these guests!"

If the Amir showed signs of ceasing to eat, we begged him not to embarrass his companions by stopping. "Your eating is in proportion to your love for us," we murmured deprecatingly, slipping a plate of rissoles in front of him. Finally the Amir rose, and we all followed his example, saying apologetically: "We beg you to forgive the shortcomings! The entertainment was not worthy of you! You have tasted none of the food!"

To clear the table, or rather the floor, of so vast a spread would take too long and be wearisome to the guests, and as a result the sweet course would be laid in another tent. After washing our hands and being sprayed with the inevitable eau de Cologne, we led the way to another tent, in the centre of which was placed a large tray of "canafa," a Palestine sweet made of cheese, treacle and nuts! Around it were arranged plates of fruit and Damascus cakes. "Do us the honour," we murmured, and the guests seated themselves in a circle once more.

After dinner came the "ta'lila," or evening's conversation. At the earlier meetings I had turned the conversation unsuccessfully

to camels, horses, greyhounds and Central Arabia. But I soon found that my guests were more interested to discuss aerial warfare, the decadence of France or atomic bombs. One of the Sudairi princes once gave me a remarkably clear-sighted appreciation of British sea-power, a factor rarely appreciated by Arabs, who are more impressed by vast land battles than by the slow and scarcely perceptible pressure of sea blockade. Eventually, after an evening of pleasant talk on many varied topics, interspersed by unending cups of tea and coffee, we would express the fear that His Excellency might be tired from his car journey, and we would retire from the tent. Two hours later, however, the Amir would still be sitting sipping black coffee surrounded by his retainers—the Arabians sleep but short nights.

*"El nom asas al lom  
Ban al reda bihu  
El ain elli tebgbi al tawlat  
Nomha shalafih . . ."*

sang the true bedouin poet.

*"Sleep is the basis of shame,  
In it the coward becomes apparent.  
The eye which seeks great deeds  
Sleeps but in snatches . . ."*

The Prince, of course, rose at dawn to pray, but I succeeded in postponing breakfast until half-past seven or eight. There was no heap of roast sheep for this meal, but the greater part of the floor of the tent was covered with small plates containing eggs done in various ways, bread, olives, honey, jam, cake, cheese, meat balls and other trifles. After breakfast I would murmur: "May I speak to you alone?" and the Amir signed to his retainers to withdraw. We sat side by side on the floor on a silk quilt, leaning on the camel saddle placed between us. Each of us fiddled with the beads of a rosary as we sat cross-legged, talking. About twenty yards in front of the open side of the tent stood a man of the Desert Patrol, his scarlet sashes fluttering a little in the breeze, far enough to be discreetly unable to hear our conversation, but near enough to be within call. Every now and again we called: "Ya Hamed, gahawa! (Coffee, O Hamed!)" He looked away and repeated in

a loud voice: "Coffee, O lads!" From the far side of the camp came a faint voice like an echo: "Yes, by Allah, coffee!"

In a few seconds the two coffee-men appeared, side by side, step by step, each holding his brass coffee-pot and cups. They halted together in front of us, and poured simultaneous cups to the Amir and myself. They took the cups back and poured a second. Then again and poured a third. Then two steps backward, turned about and off they went side by side. Ten minutes later at a pause in the conversation the process would be repeated: "O Hamed, coffee!" "My lads, coffee!" "By Allah, coffee!" And up paced the two coffee twins side by side once more.

After the first meeting or two, there was usually little or nothing to discuss, for the frontier was in profound peace, and there was no loot to be returned or murders to be compensated for. Still, a secret discussion between their two chiefs was obviously expected by both delegations, and it would have been unfair to disappoint them. Moreover, the Prince's conversation was always pleasant, and one could always discuss the United States of America or the beauties of democracy.

Sometimes the Amir would call for his clerk, who would arrive carrying a heap of files, and would triumphantly produce the case of a Saudi subject who had lost a white camel three years before. "You never replied to my letter on this subject," the Prince would say, more in sorrow than in anger. At this I would become embarrassed, make a note of the number of the letter, present profound apologies and promise to enquire immediately into the whereabouts of a pregnant white she-camel lost three years ago. Eventually we rose and strolled, smiling, from our tent—the peace of the world was saved—at least until our next meeting.

Lunch would be a repetition of dinner of the night before—five sheep on the mountain of rice, complete with a second course of sweets and fruit, and a final spray of eau de Cologne. We parted with sincere and genuine expressions of friendship and gratitude, looking forward pleasurably to our next diplomatic conference.

Undoubtedly the most historical of liaison meetings between Saudi Arabia and Trans-Jordan was the visit of Prince Saud ibn

Saud to Amman in 1936. One of the principal items in his programme was a review of representative units of the Arab Legion. The parade was not very large, but it included cavalry, infantry, Desert Patrol in trucks, camelry and town police. Their Royal Highnesses Prince Saud and Prince Tellal, the Crown Princes of Saudi Arabia and Trans-Jordan respectively, took the salute side by side on horseback.

For a year or two everything had been very quiet in the desert and we had had time to spare for refinements! Amongst other things, we had trained a troop of camelmen to give a very spectacular demonstration. Clad in yellow khaki drill with scarlet sashes and long white sleeves, and with blue and scarlet tassels swinging from their camel saddles, they presented a striking appearance. After the completion of the review, the Princes dismounted from their horses and occupied easy chairs. Coffee was served, and then my camel troops took the field.

As the rider sits on his camel in the normal way, the camel's head rises in front of him to about the level of his chest. One of the drills our camels had been taught was to lower their heads on the word of command, to allow the rider to use his rifle freely in any direction from the saddle. They also had many minor tactical evolutions which they carried out with the regularity of clockwork. Extended in a long line and trotting, suddenly every alternate rider dropped from the saddle, and fired five rounds of blank ammunition from a kneeling position, while the whole line trotted on, half the camels without riders. The firing line then, running as lightly as gazelles, overtook their trotting camels and climbed back into the saddle without checking the pace.

Other tricks were that the whole line trotting in extended order suddenly stopped, the camels knelt down, the men dismounted and ran forward in skirmishing order, lay down and opened rapid fire. The noise and smoke from the blank ammunition were considerable, and the camels were not tied, but none of them moved. In another movement, the camels lay down flat on their sides, while the men fired all around them.

All these tricks I had seen individual bedouins teach their camels here and there, but never before had a complete military unit been trained in these movements with precision and discip-

line. In the eyes of the Saudis, the Trans-Jordanians were mere farmers, not to be classed with the desert riders of Central Arabia. For such people to give an exhibition of camel tactics before Prince Saud ibn Saud was teaching grandmother to suck eggs. But however superior the people of Central Arabia might be as camelmen, they lacked the discipline and perseverance which had enabled us to train our camel troops with such detailed precision, and I was pretty certain that nothing of the kind had ever been attempted before.

In the evening, His Highness the Amir Abdulla gave a bedouin banquet to the Amir Saud in a camp of tents behind the Royal Palace. The *pièce de résistance* was a camel, roasted whole, and served kneeling in the natural position on a huge tray. The camel was stuffed with sheep roasted whole, the sheep with chickens, and the chickens with hard-boiled eggs.

During the First World War, the British Government entered into two engagements which were somewhat difficult to reconcile. In letters to the Sherif Husain of Mecca (later King Husain) they promised their support for the establishment of Arab Governments in Northern Arabia, with the exception of an undefined area west of Damascus. Meanwhile, however, they concluded an agreement with the French, by which the northern Arab countries were to be divided between them by a line called the Sykes-Picot line, after the names of the negotiators. It is true that an attempt was made by the British to reconcile the two agreements. The area west of Damascus, which was excluded from the Arab pledge, was to be administered by the French. But the Damascus area was to be an Arab Government, in which France would merely enjoy a privileged position but would not govern directly. The British implemented this proposal before the French arrived on the scene, by establishing an Arab Government in Damascus under the Amir Feisal and withdrawing the British Army.

Meanwhile the French occupied the Lebanon. But friction soon began between them and the Amir Feisal's Government, and eventually the French Army crossed the Syrian frontier, deposed Feisal, and established direct French rule in Syria. This affair provoked considerable Anglo-French friction; but the

British eventually gave way and resigned themselves to the *fait accompli*, although there can be little doubt that in doing so they acquiesced in the breach of their promises to King Husain. Five years later the Syrians revolted against French rule; but the disturbances were eventually suppressed. Many of the French were convinced that the British had encouraged the Syrians to revolt.

France and England had been rivals for nearly a thousand years. Their new alliance was not twenty years old, and had been produced only by their mutual fears of Germany. But in the East, the memories of their rivalries were still vivid. Thus, while France and Britain were still nominal allies in Europe, there was no love lost between their local representatives in the Arab countries.

The Sykes-Picot frontier had been intended by the negotiators to leave the whole of the Druze country in Syria. Unfortunately, as so often seemed to be the case, the negotiators must have used a small-scale or an inaccurate map, for the frontier as they defined it ran through the hamlet of Imtan, leaving several Druze villages in Trans-Jordan. During the 1925 rebellion in Syria against the French, a number of Druzes based themselves on these Trans-Jordan villages and raided the French. The latter took the law into their own hands, crossed the Trans-Jordan frontier, and established a line more to their liking about twenty kilometres farther south. From this frontier they refused to withdraw, even when the Syrian rebellion had been finally suppressed.

The Trans-Jordan Government particularly objected to the French occupation of the ruined village of Umm al Jemal, ten miles east of the Damascus to Amman railway. The French, however, had occupied the village with a detachment of troops under a French officer. Eventually British armoured cars under a British officer were also sent to the village. The French had established themselves on the southern fringe of the village, looking south into Trans-Jordan. The British by-passed the French, and established themselves on the northern edge of the village, looking towards Syria. By these Napoleonic moves, each detachment had interposed between the enemy and his base. The tension in this little "Fashoda" incident was considerable.

The Governor of the Jebel Druze, General de Neuville-Beaucourt, was prepared to die in the last ditch. "Oum al Jemal est mon Alsace-Lorraine," he announced.

For some time the two detachments glared at one another, grouped round the Union Jack and the Tricolour. But Umm al Jemal is a wearisome place, a ruin of black lava stone in a brown desert. Boredom overcame patriotism, and the two officers for-gathered for a drink. One day the Frenchman sent a note across the village, inviting the Englishman to dinner that night. The invitation was gratefully accepted. The French officer sent off a pair of carrier pigeons, a somewhat old-world means of communication a good deal used by the French, asking for canteen stores and drinks for the dinner party. It so happened that the Englishman was killing time on the other side of the village by having a walk with his gun, when two fast pigeons came over. A right and left brought them both down, and with them two notes in French to the "*co-opérative*."

The Frenchman grew more and more restive and anxious as the evening drew on and there was no sign of the truck with his supplies. At sunset he decided that something must be done. There was no longer time to cook a dinner, even if the truck were eventually to come. Covered with shame, he wrote a note of apology to his dear colleague, asking if the dinner party could be postponed. The Englishman was, however, by no means at a loss, and replied that he understood the situation perfectly, and begged his dear colleague to dine with him.

The Frenchman accepted, and the evening was an immense success. The dinner was excellent, the principal course being two delicious roast pigeons.

My own first experience of a conference with the French was gained when I was still serving in Iraq in the early days. As a result of frontier raids on the Upper Euphrates between the Aqeidat and Dulaim tribes, a frontier conference was summoned at Al Qaim near the Syrio-Iraq frontier, just inside Iraq. We were thus the hosts, and a tented camp had been pitched for the reception of the Franco-Syrian delegates.

Shortly after the arrival of the two delegations, a crisis arose



when Lieutenant Rettier of the Franco-Syrian party burst into the mess tent and announced that the British had stolen his attaché case, together with his instructions from his Government. It appeared that he had left his case on his bed, while he went in to speak to Capitaine La Vallière in the next tent, and that in the interval all his papers had been stolen by the British Secret Service. His perturbation seemed to suggest that his instructions were of an extremely dubious nature. We all searched for the British Secret Service for twenty minutes, until Lieutenant Rettier remembered that he had left his case under his pillow, where it was found to be still reposing.

The conference proceeded the next morning and again after lunch. At tea-time we parted for an hour's rest. While we were sitting in our tents, a party of horse and camelmén of the Dulaim tribe passed about a mile from the camp. They broke into a canter, shouted their war-cry and fired a few scattered shots in the air. While they did so, however, they were cantering not towards but away from our camp. The incident occupied perhaps two or three minutes.

When we reassembled in the conference tent after tea, it was obvious that we were in for trouble. The French delegation were all military officers in full uniform, the British were clad in rather nondescript civilian suitings or grey flannel trousers. As we entered the tent, the three French officers were standing to attention. Capitaine La Vallière was one pace in front of the others, completely wrapped in the scarlet cloak of the French Camel Corps. All three were staring in front of them in silence. Faced with this demonstration of military force, the British paused in hesitation. Capitaine La Vallière then announced in solemn tones: "The dignity of the French Republic has been insulted."

The leader of the British delegation, Major Campbell, cleared his throat, pulled his tie straight and began: "I say, we really are awfully sorry—I am sure there was no intention . . ."

But here Capitaine La Vallière interrupted him by saying: "I accept the apology of the British Delegation."

The three French officers solemnly gave the military salute together. Major Campbell, now completely unnerved, removed

his hat. Mr. Fosdick bowed from the waist. A more fantastic scene in a small tent in the middle of the Arabian desert can scarcely be conceived. In spite of the British apology, acknowledged with so dramatic a gesture, Capitaine La Vallière stalked from the conference tent still wrapped in his scarlet cloak, and the Franco-Syrian delegation tied up its baggage and drove back to Syria without further parley.

The negotiations were later resumed at Deir az Zor, where they were brought to a successful conclusion under the wise and humorous chairmanship of Colonel Andrea. At a later meeting at Abu Kemal, I had the honour also of meeting the famous Capitaine Müller of the French Camel Corps, though all I can remember is his shaking up an extraordinary mixture of drinks in an Arab brass coffee-pot some time after midnight, crying: "Un cocktail, mon camarade!"

These reminiscences are irrelevant, for they do not concern the Arab Legion, but they will suffice to show that I had some experience of the French before I came to Trans-Jordan.

When the Desert Patrol was first created in 1931, relations between Trans-Jordan and the French administration of Syria were anything but good. The tension was partly due to political reasons, partly to the frontier dispute and the French occupation of Umm al Jemal, but partly also because tribal raiding was still in progress, and neither side was strong enough to command the unquestioning obedience of its own tribes. The first task which fell on the Arab Legion was, therefore, to ensure its own absolutely undisputed control of the tribes before any further conferences with the French could be usefully undertaken.

How this control was established and how tracks were cleared through the hitherto unexplored lava desert has already been told. The situation was, however, rather different from that on the Saudi frontier. In the latter area the Saudi Government could always maintain order if it so desired, both because it was prepared to use firmer measures and also because, being largely a bedouin Government, it was perfectly familiar with the people. The French were always foreigners in Syria, and were thus greatly handicapped as compared with Saudi Arabia or Trans-

Jordan, where everything was organized on Arab lines. Most of us have been brought up with the idea that the British are an insular people, who cannot speak foreign languages or understand other nations. But experience in the Arab countries had convinced me that the British are less insular than the French, at any rate in their dealings with Eastern races. Far fewer French than British officers learned Arabic or endeavoured to understand and co-operate with the people.

In putting an end to raiding on the Syrio-Trans-Jordan frontier, however, the Arab Legion was in a strong position, for the great majority of the Syrian tribes entered Trans-Jordan for grazing in winter. Another asset in our favour was the existence of the salt-pans at Azraq in Trans-Jordan. Many Syrian tribes were in the habit of earning a little money by sending caravans of camels to Azraq to load up salt, which they sold in Syria.

In practice, therefore, we found that we could stop raiding on both sides of the frontier, not only in our own territory. If a raiding party from Syria looted flocks from Trans-Jordan, we ascertained the tribe, section and identity of the offenders, and waited. Within a few months, members of this tribe or section would almost certainly enter Trans-Jordan, and then we would pounce and seize from them a number of animals equivalent to those looted from us by them or their relations. Such action, which is a regular tribal practice known as "wesga," was carried out in a calm and deliberate manner, the reason for the seizure being explained to the victims, who were given a month to hand back the animals looted by their fellow tribesmen. On expiry of the period of grace, the flocks seized by us were handed over to the victims of the raid in full settlement, and both sides were notified that the case was closed.

Such action led to no subsequent resentment or further reprisals, for we had taken care to ascertain the exact numbers of animals raided and to seize flocks of identical value. To have proclaimed the raiders to be wanted by the police would have been to create criminals, for a wanted man often becomes a desperate man. He argues that as the police are looking for him, he may as well commit some more crimes. At the same time, our intelligence was so good that we never missed recovering compensation for every

raid, with the result that raiding was no longer worth while, and soon ceased.

This we were able to do only because the Desert Patrol was in itself entirely composed of bedouins, including men of all the tribes concerned in these feuds. These men felt no scruples in acting against raiders of their own tribes. We were able to attain this degree of efficiency by the high moral standard which we had inculcated in our own men. Their numbers were so few and the desire of the tribesmen to enlist was so great, that we were able to pick and test each man individually. We spent much time in explaining to every individual man exactly what we were trying to do, how the age of raiding was past, and how much better it was for the tribes to learn to accommodate themselves voluntarily to the conditions of the modern world. Every soldier had ocular proof of the benevolent intentions of the Government, when he saw new medical clinics and hospitals opened, the sick and the old receiving free treatment, and the children admitted to school. Finally, the penalties we inflicted were not vicious or ruinous, so that the tribal soldier did not hesitate to arrest his own fellow tribesmen. He knew that they would meet not only with justice but with mercy, and just enough of a penalty to deter them from repeating the offence.

The men of the Desert Patrol were the most ardent missionaries of reform. They acted with all their power to put an end to raiding by their fellow tribesmen, because they believed the latter to be mistaken and deluded, and they longed to convert them to the gospel of the new age.

When raiding ceased on the Syrio-Trans-Jordan frontier, we were fortunate to find as tribal officer in the Jebel Druze so sympathetic a collaborator as Capitaine Filliet. In dealing with the French, the British labour under the same handicap as in their relations with many Eastern races—the belief that Britain is intensely clever and subtle.

Oriental see Great Britain as the leading member of a great Empire. Yet at close quarters they see the British committing the grossest blunders, and apparently doing nothing to deny the many lies and libels circulated about them by their enemies. Such

impassivity or inefficiency seems to these spectators incredible. It is inconceivable to them that people so feeble or so simple as the British seem to be could have ruled such an Empire for two centuries. Hence has arisen the theory widely believed in the East that the British are so subtle that no one can read their tortuous minds, and that the appearance of being simple honest fellows is assumed to conceal their Machiavellian machinations.

The French seem to share something of this belief in British perfidy, a fact which made it remarkably difficult to deal with them in Syria. On one occasion we took great trouble to invite the French Governor of the Jebel Druze to Trans-Jordan. We entertained him as best we could, allowed him to see all the country, and grew, as we thought, exceedingly friendly with him. A month later we received from British Government sources copies of a protest despatched by the French Foreign Office based on a report submitted by our late guest, and accusing me of fantastic intrigues in Syria. It was a shock to notice that the date of Colonel Chevalier's report on my treacheries was immediately after his return from his convivial stay in my house. Yet I believe that Colonel Chevalier was an honest man and a soldier, and believed what he wrote. But he was obsessed with his idea of the extreme subtlety of the British, and in the face of every gesture of friendliness by us, he was only the more convinced that he was in the presence of a tortuous member of the British "Secret Service."

Capitaine Filliet was, however, exempt from such suspicions. In him I found a man who placed all his cards on the table, and who was ready to believe that I was doing the same. We acquired confidence in each other's honesty, and each of us accepted without question any statement made by the other. I enjoyed a pleasant stay with the Filliets in their house at Soueida, the capital of the Jebel Druze, during which I saw most of the sights of the province, including the many Roman ruins. Later in 1937, Capitaine and Madame Filliet stayed in my house in Amman. Our mutual confidence and co-operation produced a profound effect on public security on the frontier. Would-be trouble makers were quick to sense that there was here no chance of profiting by stirring up distrust between the two Governments.

In 1936 Syria was full of talk of independence, and a treaty was being negotiated between Syria and France on the lines of that concluded some years before between Britain and Iraq. Meanwhile the French had to some extent relaxed their control, and a Syrian Council of Ministers had been formed. Whenever European control of some Eastern country is withdrawn, the prophets foretell that the result will be chaos and that supervision will soon have to be reimposed. But this never happens. The East is still deeply in need of European help, but it is suspicious that such help may conceal an ulterior motive. It is incumbent upon us to supply such disinterested and devoted service to our Eastern brothers. Capitaine Filliet, more than most French officers, seemed to realize that the Syrians would succeed in governing themselves. "Ils s'entre-tueront peut-être un peu," he said, "mais ça marchera."

Filliet returned to France before the outbreak of war, and was at the front on the occasion of the debacle of 1940. After the collapse of France, he came back to Syria, and fought against us in our invasion of the country in 1941. Later he rallied to the Allied cause, and was killed in North Africa. God rest his soul! He was to me both a colleague and a friend.

One morning in 1935 I was sitting in my little office in Amman, when I walked a stout middle-aged woman, dressed in a plain grey smock, with bare, sandalled feet. She announced in voluble French that she had come with several hampers of clothing which she proposed to present to bedouin children. She demanded transport to some large camp in the desert.

Ready enough to secure some benefit for the poor of my people, I agreed to transport her next day to Bair desert post. She talked the whole way, telling me how she had once been a countess with a salon in Paris, but that after the death of her husband she had given up all she possessed in the world to devote herself to God. She spent four months of the year begging money or material for her poor, then for four months she sewed the material into garments. For the last four months of the year she toured the countryside, distributing these garments to the poor. She had founded an order of nuns to follow the example of

Father Charles de Foucauld, who had given his life in the service of the people of the Sahara. Foolishly I asked how many members had joined her order. "I am still the only one," she answered. "But God will send me helpers if He will." As we drove past the wells at Bair, tribesmen standing by the track saluted and smiled. "Vos hommes vous aiment, mon commandant!" she said.

Sister Marie soon took possession of the fort at Bair. The Desert Patrol had never seen her like, and were at a loss what to do when she peremptorily ordered these bearded warriors to unload her boxes. Soon the office, the rest-room and the store were strewn with diminutive garments, which Sister Marie was actively arranging in piles on some system unfathomable to mere men. When I went to examine the records of the post, I found a heap of children's knickers on the office table, while a bale of pinafores occupied the chair. "Ne touchez pas!" screamed a shrill voice, and I decided to inspect the riding camels in the courtyard instead.

The next morning I found that Sister Marie had marshalled several soldiers from the fort and was setting out for the tribal tents on the wells half a mile away. Striding along in front, she was followed by two shy-looking warriors, with long beards and resplendent in their scarlet sashes and silver daggers, carrying baskets of baby clothes. The party returned two hours later, having disposed of their garments. This, Sister Marie explained, was merely a preliminary subterfuge.

She proposed to stipulate that every child should have a bath as the price of receiving a garment. She had not mentioned this condition at the morning's distribution, which was intended merely to whet the appetite of her victims. Having issued all that was in her baskets, she had told the remaining children to come to the fort in an hour's time. Meanwhile she set herself (and all the men who fell into her masterful clutches) to heat water and prepare a bath-tub. Soon the children began to arrive as though Sister Marie had been the Pied Piper of Hamelin. As each entered, she seized it, tore off its greasy clothes, and forced it into the bath-tub. Then rolling up her sleeves, she set herself to scrub.

When this had been going on for about three hours, I looked into the room where she was working to ask her if she wanted any

lunch. The room was steamy and smelly, a heap of dirty rags lay on the floor, Sister Marie was dishevelled and exhausted. "How I hate this filth!" she said suddenly. "I do it for love of my Saviour!"

Two different persons seemed to struggle for the control of this strong personality. The one sighed for the salon in Paris, the other begged barefoot in the streets of Palestine. "Ça me dégoûte," said the Countess. "C'est pour l'amour du Christ," said Sister Marie of Jesus.

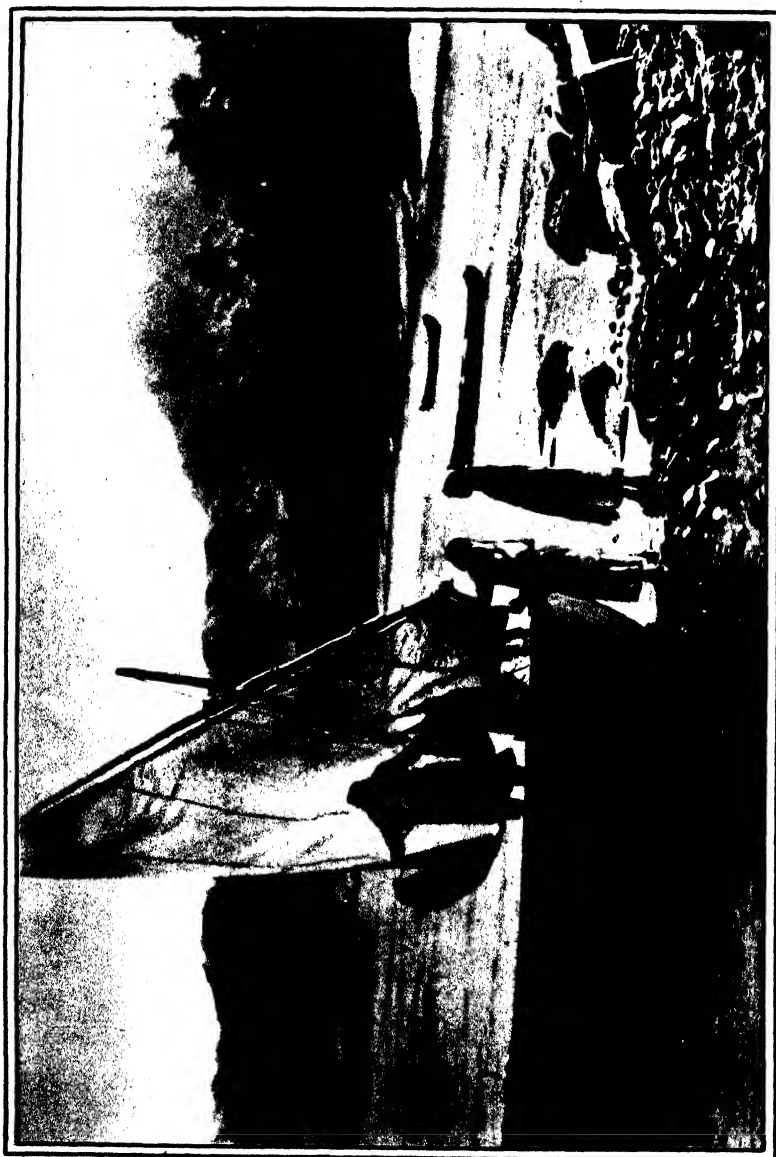






**NAWAB SALAR JUNG BAHADUR**  
The Desert Patrol in the ruins of Petra

*Frank Hurley*



*Frank Harley*

# XII

## *Strife in Palestine*

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:  
They shall prosper that love thee.  
Peace be within thy walls,  
And prosperity within thy palaces.  
For my brethren and companions' sakes,  
I will now say, Peace be within thee."

PSALM cxxii.



## STRIFE IN PALESTINE

**I** FIRST came in contact with the Palestine problem in 1932. I was a member of the Bedouin Control Board, a special Court of Justice which sat in Amman to try Bedouin tribal cases. The President of the Board was His Highness the Amir Shakir.

One evening I arrived in Amman from the desert to attend a session of the board next day. A number of outstanding tribal cases were to be settled. The following morning I walked through the town of Amman to the Court. In one of the streets a large crowd was wedged, and a man raised on the shoulders of the others was making a speech on the subject of the Palestine situation. Others were waving sticks, banners and clubs. I did not take much notice, my mind being occupied with my own affairs and with the tribal disputes we were to try. I was slipping through the fringe of the crowd, when the speaker shouted something I did not catch, and suddenly the whole crowd seemed to turn towards me and closed in with angry shouts. I walked on until I was clear of the crowd, which, however, formed up behind me and followed me down the street, shouting. A soldier of the Desert Patrol emerged from a shop and ran to my side. Suddenly a few stones came over and rattled on the pavement round my feet. We turned and faced the crowd, the leaders of which stopped about five yards from us. The soldier stepped forward between me and the crowd, and shouted to them, but nobody could hear. After facing them for half a minute, we turned and walked away, but again a shower of stones rattled around us. We faced round again and confronted our persecutors, when suddenly there was a sound of galloping horses, and through the crowd burst the Amir Shakir himself on horseback, followed by three or four mounted slaves. They wheeled their horses, waved their canes in the air and ordered the crowd back. The crowd burst into cheers and clapping. The Prince was popular and was also a beautiful horseman, and to see

him handling his grey pony was a pleasure in itself. A slave galloped off to fetch a car, while His Highness skirmished between me and the crowd. Soon the car arrived, and the Amir Shakir, dismounting, drove off with me to the board meeting.

The Palestine question has given rise to so much propaganda and aroused such bitter partisan feeling, that it is difficult for the uninitiated to form a clear picture of the main issues.

The Jews were originally a nomadic tribe, like hundreds of others. They settled in Palestine, as one of several tribes, but at a certain stage they acquired political domination over the others. Their greatest period was in the time of King Solomon, in the tenth century before Christ. A period of political extinction followed, with a partial revival in the time of the Maccabees in the second century before Christ. Jewish political influence in Palestine was destroyed by the Romans in the year A.D. 70. For the ensuing 600 years, the political control of Palestine remained in Roman hands. For the subsequent 1,300 years, it has rested with the Arabs and the Turks.

For nearly 2,000 years the Jews have been scattered. Often they have been persecuted, particularly in Europe. It was Theodore Herzl, an Austrian Jew, who in 1896 published a pamphlet in which the idea of constituting a Jewish state in the Holy Land was first propounded. Early in the present century, the first Jewish colonies were established in Palestine, then still part of the Turkish Empire.

The Jews were quick to realize their opportunity during the First World War when they saw the British Army invade Palestine. They secured from the British Government a pronouncement stating that Britain favoured the establishment of a national home for the Jews in Palestine, on condition that such a scheme was not harmful to the interests of the non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine. This pronouncement has come to be known as the Balfour Declaration.

The Jewish case in Palestine is based on two considerations. The first is historic, and refers to the former dominions of Solomon and the age of the Maccabees. The second is the British promise contained in the Balfour Declaration, and subsequently accepted

by the League of Nations and incorporated in the Palestine Mandate. Yet habitation 2,000 years ago can scarcely be accepted as justification for a claim to the ownership of a country today. In the past 2,000 years every nation in Europe has changed. Goths, Vandals and Mongols have swept over and colonized the Continent. Danes, Scandinavians and Normans have replaced the original inhabitants of Britain. Asia Minor has passed from Rome to Turkey. These are but a few examples. The most striking example of all, however, is provided by North America, which not 2,000 but 500 years ago belonged exclusively to the Red Indians. Is it practicable today to hand back their national home to the Redskins?

A Jewish claim to the ownership of Palestine, based on the Balfour Declaration, is no less difficult to justify. When that Declaration was made, ninety per cent. of the people of Palestine were Arabs. Now, democracy is the political creed of the British Government. By democracy we mean that the majority of the population has the right to decide policy. There may be much to be said for and against government by majority, but there can be no doubt that it is the official doctrine of the British Government. In every country in the world except Palestine Great Britain advises the adoption of this system. The Arabs of Palestine alone have not been allowed a voice in their own future.

To impose on the Arab majority in Palestine a policy so extremely distasteful to them required coercion by military force. The British Army found itself unwillingly obliged to force on the people of Palestine a policy bitterly opposed by the majority of the people. Military coercion of a civilian population has always been extremely distasteful to the people of Britain. It was one of the many ironies of the Palestine muddle that the Jews, who seemed in Europe to be an oppressed minority, arrived in Palestine in the guise of European colonizers. Many of the parties which in Europe and America have been the loudest to denounce European "Imperialism," yet support the forcible colonization of Palestine by military force. A movement which to Europeans stands for liberal idealism is thus transformed in Palestine into military imperialism.

This is one side of the picture. On the other we see the Jews,



scattered for 2,000 years, and so often the victims of persecution, or at least ostracism or discrimination. They can endure it no longer. They are tired of being everywhere a minority in other people's countries. This time they will have a country where they will be their own masters.

It is to be noted that this attitude betokens a change in the Jewish outlook. For centuries the Jews have been a religion rather than a race. The influence of modern nationalism has transformed them into a nation, and a nation needs a Government and a country, as a religion does not. It is this same spirit of modern nationalism which is forging the Arabs into a nation. We can blame neither Jews nor Arabs for becoming infected with this spirit, for it was Western Europe which created modern nationalism.

At least 600,000 Jews have entered Palestine since 1920. An equivalent invasion of Britain would have meant an influx of 25,000,000 aliens. Would any people in the world have accepted forcible immigration on anything approaching such a scale?

Yet once the Jews, under European influence, came to look upon themselves as a race, can they be blamed for wanting a country?

From the British point of view, the problem was a conflict of two idealisms. The British pro-Arab enthusiasts saw themselves rebuilding the Empire of the Khalifs, freed by British arms from Turkish tyranny. Other British idealists visualized the revived glories of a new Jerusalem, re-established once more in the Holy Land—and this by the valour of British arms and the vision of British statesmen.

The villains of the Palestine tragedy—if villains there be—were neither the Jews, the Arabs nor the British. Ironically enough, the Arabs and the British had discriminated against the Jews less than any other races of the West. Other nations of Europe and America, some of whom had discriminated against and others actually persecuted the Jews, did nothing whatever to solve the problem which they had created. They one and all refused to accept any displaced Jews themselves, but were loud in their criticisms of Britain and the Arabs for not doing more. Is it an exaggeration to brand such an attitude as cynical and immoral?

The Jewish tragedy owed its origin to the Christian nations of Europe and America. At last the conscience of Christendom was awake. This age-long Jewish tragedy must cease. But when it came to the payment of compensation in expiation of their past shortcomings, the Christian nations of Europe and America decided that the bill should be paid by a Muslim nation of Asia.

I have described how, in 1932, I and a soldier of the Desert Patrol were stoned in the streets of Amman, because the Arabs were indignant over British policy in Palestine. By the time the disturbances began in 1936, however, I had made more friends in Amman, and the warm-hearted people of Trans-Jordan had at least partially adopted me.

One of the most attractive qualities of the Arabs is their individualism, which forms so pleasant a contrast to the mass movements and opinions of most of Europe. For three years, on and off, the Arabs of Palestine were engaged in active hostilities against the British Army. Many volunteers from Trans-Jordan forded the river and joined the rebels in Palestine in fighting the British. Yet the attitude of the Arabs of Trans-Jordan to "their" Englishmen never perceptibly varied. It is perhaps true that some of us had devoted a great part of our lives to the service of the Arabs, but would a German who had served France or England have been exempted from all penalties in the last war in Europe?

In 1936 and 1937 I often rode up the Jordan valley, on the east bank of the river, and was everywhere greeted, not only with kindness but with enthusiasm, and pressed to stay for lunch and for dinner. On the other side of the narrow stream, the Arabs were engaged in active hostilities against the British forces. Few races today, I believe, would have exercised the same personal discrimination as was shown in our favour by the Arabs of Trans-Jordan throughout this bitter struggle.

Country people are, of course, everywhere less concerned with politics than city dwellers, and more inclined to regard all fighting as a sporting event. A corporal in the Desert Patrol one day accosted me with a request to enlist his brother. Among the many desirable qualities which he possessed the corporal mentioned that his brother had plenty of experience of war. I enquired

where such experience had been gained, and was told by the corporal, who obviously saw nothing remarkable in his answer:

"He has been in several battles against the English in Palestine. He only left because he was wounded by a bullet in the shoulder in a battle near Tiberias. But he is well again now, and I am sure he would make a very useful man in the Arab Legion with all his fighting experience!"

In Konrad Heiden's biography of Hitler, he remarks that the German Workers' Party believed that truth was bound to triumph in the end; but Hitler knew better—he was aware that with propaganda the public could be made to believe any story. We may perhaps afford to disregard the more extreme Jewish pamphlets which speak of the blood-thirsty colonizers trampling under foot the soil of the homeland, when we realize that it was only the British Balfour Declaration which enabled these tens of thousands of Russian, Polish and German Jews to reach Palestine at all. But much of the propaganda was more subtle than this mere vituperation, and attributed to poor Britain the most tortuous schemes for setting the Jews against the Arabs. The fact that Britain had withdrawn from Iraq and was reducing her commitments all over the East, and everywhere assisting the formation of free local Governments, counted for nothing. To ascertain the truth needs a certain amount of mental alertness and effort, whereas the political pamphlet or the extremist newspaper is thrust into the hands of the man in the street. To read it requires little or no effort. The fallacy of a free press and free speech is that the public is nearly always too lazy to look for truth itself. A great part of the people who force information on the public have an ulterior motive.

It is remarkable to what an extent misinterpretations of Britain and her policy can be believed by entire nations. In such circumstances, the British scarcely seem to deign to notice what is being said or written about them, but appear mildly surprised at the hatred evoked. Perhaps, like the German Workers' Party, they believe that truth will triumph in the end—a naïve idea in the modern world.

All the noise and publicity of which Palestine has been the

victim have performed two things—they have confused the situation so much that the world at large is unable to judge the issues, and they have destroyed the confidence of all communities in the Palestine Government.

When King Tzu asked Confucius for a definition of good government, the Master replied: "It consists in providing enough food to eat, in keeping enough soldiers to guard the state, and in winning the confidence of the people."

"And if one of these three had to be sacrificed, which should go first?"

The Master replied: "Sacrifice the soldiers."

"And if, of the two remaining things one had to be sacrificed, which should it be?"

The Master said: "Let it be the food. From the beginning, men have always had to die. But without the confidence of the people, no Government can stand at all."

The Palestine Government has struggled along in this unenviable situation for twenty-five years.

From 1936 to 1938 the Arab revolt had plunged Palestine into anarchy. Meanwhile Europe itself was drifting into war. Italy had invaded Abyssinia, then allied herself with Germany to form the Axis. Soon Germany herself entered Austria; then followed Munich.

How often did I not sigh with relief as the car wound up the hair-pin bends out of the Amman valley after one of my four- or five-day visits to the capital. What a relief to escape from the news of all this hatred and fear, so near to us in Palestine, so much more formidable, even if a little farther off, in Europe. Soon we would emerge on the rolling open plains covered with fields of wheat and barley, and then over the railway, into the bush-covered desert, and before us would open range beyond range of pale-blue hills. Here and there we would pass a flock of grazing camels or sheep, the herdsman saluting or waving a greeting. Perhaps we might chance upon a little group of tents in a green valley, and a man would run out, waving his cloak and calling:

"Dismount! Dismount! Dinner and a host for the night."

"God bless you," we would answer; "but we are in a hurry! Another time we will come!"

"No! No! It shall not be."

"But we have work to do!"

"Work never ends except in the grave! You can do your work tomorrow!"

With difficulty we would excuse ourselves, with many pretexts and promises. It would be dusk as we reached one of the desert forts. Many such scenes are still vivid in my memory. Willing hands swing open the gate, smiling faces call greetings of welcome. Carpets are unrolled and spread by a blazing fire. The kettle is quickly placed on the embers.

"Most blessed hour which brings these guests!" cry the soldiers, as they run to bring coffee and order dinner.

Outside the walls of the fort the immense desert stretches in darkness and a silence so intense that with the utmost attention it is impossible to hear any sound. Overhead the sky is covered with the sharp brightness of Arabian stars. In the courtyard of the fort by contrast are bustle and gay voices. Flames shoot high from a fire in the open court, throwing dancing shadows on the high stone walls and lighting up the scarlet sashes and cloaks of the soldiers. Here at last one can breathe amongst friends a sigh of peace and relaxation. The terrorism and bloodshed of Palestine, the menaces of Hitler and Mussolini, seem suddenly far away. To a great part of the world the desert means fear, exhaustion or at best discomfort. For ten years, it replaced for me the relaxation, the happiness and the affection of home.

By the autumn of 1938 the Arab rising in Palestine was obviously petering out. There were two British divisions in the country, and most of the Arab leaders had been obliged to flee to Damascus, whence they directed operations from afar. The Arab inhabitants of Palestine, particularly the peasants and villagers, had suffered terribly, and were nearing complete exhaustion.

In view of this situation, the leaders in Damascus decided to make a last effort to raise a rebellion in Trans-Jordan. The Arab Legion was, it was thought, too weak in numbers to offer serious opposition. If the rebellion was successful, British troops might

be moved from Palestine to Trans-Jordan to suppress it, and the pressure on the Arabs of Palestine would thereby be relieved. Moreover, Trans-Jordan was much larger than Palestine, much wilder and more mountainous, and the inhabitants were more warlike. If it had taken two British divisions to suppress the disturbances in Palestine, it would take an even greater force to restore order in Trans-Jordan. It was doubtful if Britain, especially in view of the increasing menace of war in Europe, could afford to send more troops. Thus the plan for raising a rebellion in Trans-Jordan was worth trying.

During the three years of the Palestine disturbances, the strength of the Arab Legion had been increased by several hundred men. So entirely had Trans-Jordan been controlled by the consent and with the willing co-operation of the people, that from 1930 to 1936 there had been no reserve of armed forces whatever. The whole strength of the Arab Legion, about 1,200 men, was distributed in small forts and district headquarters throughout the country. Whatever may be said for or against the Government of Trans-Jordan, the fact remains that from 1930 to 1936 an area the size of England was controlled by a total force of 1,200 men (including police), and this although the great majority of the inhabitants possessed and carried firearms, a practice permitted by law. No more conclusive proof could be asked for that the people were satisfied with their Ruler and his Government.

From 1936 onwards the threats to the security of Trans-Jordan from disturbances in neighbouring states rendered the existence of some central reserve essential. Not only was Palestine in chaos, but Syria was in considerable turmoil owing to the tentative French recognition of Syrian independence, a recognition withdrawn again in 1938. In view of these disturbances, reserve forces were sanctioned and trained, consisting of two squadrons of horsed cavalry and a detachment of 350 bedouin soldiers in trucks, a force which was eventually to attain considerable fame. For the moment, it received the name of the Desert Mechanized Force.

On March 9th, a gang of about a hundred Arabs crossed the frontier from Syria into Trans-Jordan. They were dressed in

khaki uniforms, and carried their equipment on pack-mules, together with a considerable quantity of explosives, presumably for purposes of sabotage. The party passed the day of March 10th in a village inside Trans-Jordan. On the morning of March 11th, a patrol of two cavalry troopers of the Arab Legion located the gang in the village of Deir as Sana, but succeeded in making good their escape under rifle fire and reporting the location of the band. The latter decided to move on at once, in order to reach the wooded mountains of Ajlun, the edge of which was only five miles distant.

After passing the Syrian frontier, the gang had to cross twenty miles of open undulating country, covered with wheat and barley and dotted with villages, before they reached the cover of the Ajlun mountains. This they could almost have done in the first night, certainly in the first twenty-four hours. Why they took forty-eight hours cannot be explained. Presumably they were over-confident and expected no opposition. As a result of the brush with the cavalry patrol on the morning of March 11th, however, they seemed to have suddenly taken fright. They set out forthwith for the hills, and were soon streaming across the open country through the fields of green wheat, heading for the wooded foothills just in front of them.

Meanwhile a fighting patrol of the Arab Legion, ten cavalry under a sergeant, galloped up and engaged the enemy. By this means they obliged the gang to take cover, and pinned them to their ground for several hours, although the enemy was nearly ten times as numerous as they. By this gallant action, the patrol prevented the escape of the gang to the mountains. Thirty men of the Arab Legion in cars arrived next, and a spirited action was soon in progress.

About noon, part of the Desert Mechanized Force arrived in trucks, commanded by Lieutenant Macadam, one of the very few British officers in the Arab Legion. The bedouins leaped from their trucks and raced in to action with shouts and war-cries, and were soon pressing on to the enemy. At this stage, however, the R.A.F. appeared overhead and attacked from a low level. The two firing lines were only about one hundred yards apart, and as the aircraft came in to the attack, they seemed to Macadam

to be about to fire at his men by mistake. Although only a hundred yards from the enemy, he stood up and began to wave to the aircraft. The rebels immediately saw him to be an officer, and a few seconds later he fell at full length, shot through the body, and died immediately.

The aircraft appeared, however, to be quite capable of locating the enemy, and put in several successive attacks on them, although the firing lines were so close. Whether the air attack was useful or not must remain a matter for conjecture. It probably inflicted casualties and certainly destroyed the enemy's remaining morale, but it also halted the Arab Legion advance. If the aircraft had not intervened, the gang might have been more completely rounded up, but the troops might have suffered more casualties. As it was, the Arab Legion advance did not proceed until the air action was finished in the afternoon, by which time the gang had ceased to exist. The enemy lost about thirty to thirty-five casualties in killed and wounded. Most of the remainder vanished, probably slipping away singly or in twos or threes and fording the Jordan to Palestine under cover of darkness. The Arab Legion lost one officer killed, one sergeant died of wounds, and three other ranks wounded. Thus began the unhappy episode of the Arab invasion of Trans-Jordan.

The respite thus gained was only temporary, for soon other gangs were successfully ensconced in the wooded Ajlun mountains. At the same time on March 12th, a gang from the south of Palestine crossed the southern end of the Dead Sea and captured and disarmed three men of the Arab Legion near Tafilá. The gang was estimated to be thirty strong. On March 16th, the post of Gharandal on the Palestine-Trans-Jordan frontier was fired on, but the attackers withdrew when their fire was returned.

The Arab leaders in Damascus had mistaken the spirit of the people of Trans-Jordan, who indeed had been ardent supporters of the Palestine Arabs, but who were at the same time extremely proud of their own country and of the good order and loyalty which reigned in it. They were unwilling to be forced to rebel against their own Government by an invasion from Syria or Palestine, and indeed resented the attempt. Meanwhile, several



gangs were operating in the Ajlun mountains. Their principal forms of activity were firing on cars on the roads, cutting telephone wires, and attacking the Iraq Petroleum Company's pipeline.

Guerilla warfare depends chiefly for its success on the support of the people of the country. Guerillas cannot have regular lines of communication, and are obliged to resort to the villagers for food and shelter and for their intelligence as to the movements of Government forces. Perhaps the invaders were confident of the support of the people of Trans-Jordan. Certain it is that once it became evident that such support was not forthcoming, the larger objective of the invasion had become unattainable. The gangs could no longer hope to overthrow the Trans-Jordan Government, nor to compel British troops to move from Palestine to Trans-Jordan.

While all these troubles were in progress, Colonel Peake left Trans-Jordan for England on March 26th on his retirement from Government service. He had first arrived in the country in 1917, with a detachment of the Egyptian Camel Corps attached to the Arab Army under the Amir Feisal. He raised the Arab Legion in 1921 and had commanded it ever since. Thus a considerable portion of the people of Trans-Jordan were scarcely able to remember the days before Colonel Peake came. His disappearance from the scene marked the end of an epoch for the Arab Legion, and indeed for Trans-Jordan itself.

On March 21st, 1939, I assumed command of the Arab Legion from Colonel Peake. The only other British officer in the Arab Legion, Lieutenant Macadam, had been killed in action ten days before, and I was thus left as the sole British officer in the Legion. I find noted in my diary under date of April 8th, 1939: "When the telephone rings at 1 a.m. for the fifth night in succession, it is not always easy to agree with Henry the Fifth that the fewer men the greater share of honour."

After the departure of Colonel Peake, I spent most of my time in the Ajlun area, where the gangs were still operating in the hills. The two squadrons of cavalry operated in the woods and along the more precipitous ravines where there were no tracks passable to vehicles, while the Desert Mechanized Force kept pace with

them along the tracks. One glorious spring morning in March, we were driving along a track on the western slopes of the mountains. On our left we passed a succession of little villages nestling into the wooded slopes, their groups of little whitewashed houses standing out against the dark-green woods which climbed the slopes behind them to the high crests of the mountains. On both sides of the track the green corn in the fields stood knee high and rippled in the westerly breeze. On the west the foothills fell steeply to the Jordan valley, beyond which lay the blue hills of Palestine, Mount Tabor, the distant ridge on which clustered the houses of Nazareth, and in the foreground Kaukab al Hawa—Star of the Winds—on which a crusader castle had once stood. War or no war, it was impossible not to be glad on such a morning, and the men in the trucks behind my car had already broken out into a camel trotting song.

Steadily we drove along beneath the white villages, Khanzira, Beit Idis, Kufr Abil, until we came to the winding descent leading down and across the steep narrow ravine of the Wadi al Yabis. Beyond it, the country was clothed with the thick woods of the Wadi al Nom. We halted for a rest, when suddenly we heard a distant shot. Then more, then rapid and heavy firing—then several Very lights rose and fell in the woods beyond the ravine. One of the cavalry squadrons must be in action. We could see nobody, as the battle was apparently going on in the woods. Between us and the firing lay the Wadi al Yabis, a ravine several hundred feet deep, with steep slippery slopes clothed in dry grass, such as sometimes are to be found in the Sussex Downs or in Wiltshire. On the crest of the opposite slope began the woods.

In a matter of seconds every man was out of his vehicle, two Lewis guns were unshipped, and we were all running at full speed down the slopes of the ravine. How we ran, and still ran, listening to the firing ahead! But when we crossed the gravelly bed of the stream and started a 600-foot climb up a slippery grass slope, it was no longer a question of running, but of scrambling on all-fours. For a short time, we continued to urge each other on by calling: "Your comrades, lads! To the help of your comrades." But soon nobody had any breath left. Half-way up the slope, we collapsed

exhausted. Perhaps we should have reached the top faster if we had begun more slowly.

If the enemy had appeared on the crest of the ridge above us, and seen forty or fifty of us lying panting on the grassy slope below, we should have been in an awkward situation. Fortunately no one peered at us from above, and in a few minutes we struggled on hands and knees to the summit. Before us and away to our left lay the ridges and valleys clothed in forest. On our right the trees ended, and the little whitewashed village of Fara clung to the crest of a spur looking out over the Jordan valley, and surrounded by the bright metallic green of young wheat-fields.

We moved forward cautiously, deployed on a wide front, until a mile farther on we came upon the cavalry squadron as it emerged from the woods on to the edge of the wheat-fields of Fara. They had run into a gang in the woods, they said, and there had been a lot of shooting for a short time, although the undergrowth was too thick to see what was going on. A soldier's battle it appeared, but one fought with considerable dash and enthusiasm. The gang meanwhile had faded away, probably down the wooded foothills towards the Jordan and Palestine. The gang was subsequently reported to have suffered seven casualties. The Arab Legion had one cavalry horse killed. We spent the night with the cavalry in the little village of Fara. Next morning a patrol of the Desert Force came upon some stragglers from the gang, killed one and captured another.

The final action of the "campaign" was fought on the morning of April 24th. The cavalry had found the key to this gang warfare in keeping the enemy on the move. The rebel bands were obliged to live on the country, and the country was not particularly anxious to be lived on, although the villagers were too afraid of the gangs to offer active resistance. But whenever a gang settled down in a village to await a good meal or to enjoy a night's rest, the advanced guard of one of our two cavalry squadrons appeared in sight, and the gang found itself obliged to move on. Such ubiquity meant hard work for the troops as much as for the gangs, or nearly as hard, for they also got little rest, though they were better off for supplies and were riding horses, while most of the gangs were on foot. But it meant for the troops days, if not weeks,



THEY'RE BACK TO THE MOUNTAINS

The Cavalry was in the mountains



A troop of Cavalry setting out on patrol

in the field, riding long hours, and eating and sleeping in the open when occasion offered.

British troops might well have learned a lesson from the Arab Legion in this respect. When a gang was located in Palestine, British troops turned out and engaged them. But when the action was over, the troops usually returned to their camps. By this means the gang, even if defeated, had time to get clear, and then to eat and rest unmolested, before embarking on a fresh enterprise. The only way to defeat guerillas is with better guerillas, not by the methods of regular warfare. But it must be admitted that in Palestine the gangs enjoyed the support of the civil population, while in Trans-Jordan the villagers were on the side of the Government.

On the morning of April 24th, at 2 a.m., my bedside telephone rang to report that a gang of 200 men was in the village of Beit Idis. They were apparently mining the road north of the village to prevent the approach of the Desert Mechanized Force. Two cavalry squadrons were believed to be south of Beit Idis. The absence of wireless sets with the horsed cavalry squadrons made it difficult to direct their movements towards the enemy.

The telephone rang every half-hour for the rest of the night, just as I was dropping off to sleep again, as telephones will. Soon after dawn the cavalry were said to be moving up towards Beit Idis from the south, while a detachment of the Desert Mechanized Force, coming towards the village from the north, had reached the place where the road had been mined.

When the first squadron of cavalry came in view, the enemy abandoned Beit Idis and moved up into the wooded mountain slopes above the village. The squadron of cavalry followed, and was going into action when the second squadron appeared on its right. The gang made off northwards through the woods, but meanwhile the detachment of the Desert Force had abandoned their vehicles and were moving through the woods in open order making for the sound of firing. In this way, they struck the flank of the gang, which was retiring before the cavalry.

The bedouins dashed into action with their customary fervour and the gang retired hastily northwards. A sharp running fight ensued, in precipitous mountains covered with thick scrub, the

gang flitting ahead from tree-trunk to tree-trunk, the troops crashing along behind at the best pace they could. Towards evening, when contact was nearly lost, a detachment of the Frontier Force arriving from the north bumped into the flank of the retreating enemy, and the action flared up again for a short time. In the day's fighting, this gang of about 200 men were reported to have suffered eleven killed and more than twenty wounded. The Frontier Force had one man slightly wounded; the Arab Legion suffered no casualties at all. It was obvious that the Arab Legion could already claim to be better guerillas than the gangs.

This successful action produced a striking moral effect both on the troops and on the gangs. The remnants of the rebels crossed into Syria that night and never returned. The invasion of Trans-Jordan was at an end.

The whole of this unhappy affair was a sad misunderstanding. For every man in Trans-Jordan and in the Arab Legion sympathized with the cause of the Arabs of Palestine. But their leaders made a profound miscalculation when they attempted to produce a rebellion in Trans-Jordan against an Arab Government, and that by force and without the prior consent of the people. There was indeed no little difference of opinion among the rebels themselves as to the advisability of invading Trans-Jordan. In the end, as some of the Arabic newspapers in Damascus pointed out, the Arabs found themselves fighting one another, while the British and the Jews in Palestine looked on unmolested.

Politics apart, the Arab Legion as a military force surprised the world. In Palestine, two divisions of British troops had been pursuing the rebel bands for years. In Trans-Jordan, two cavalry squadrons and the Desert Mechanized Force had eliminated them in two months. Doubtless the gangs in Palestine were more numerous, but they were infinitely less in proportion to the number of troops. Again, the villagers in Palestine supported the rebels; in Trans-Jordan the Government. But even when all these allowances were made, the Arab Legion had done well. It had been completely loyal to its own Government, had stuck to its task for two months in the face of exhaustion and discomfort, had never left the open field or rested, and had pressed home its attack

in every action with a dash and a speed worthy of the past exploits of the martial race. In so doing, it surprised the British, who are apt to imagine that only themselves can be efficient. To the world at large, it gave the first proof of those sterling qualities which were to shine forth so nobly in the sterner test to come.

During these two months in the mountains, the Arab Legion not only eliminated the rebel gangs, but in the process it opened seventy-five kilometres of track passable to vehicles across the mountains, much of it involving rock blasting and hacking down trees and undergrowth. In this the troops were ably and cheerfully assisted by the villagers, who had come to realize not only that tracks enabled the troops to protect the villages from the extortions of the gangs, but also that better communications would increase their own prosperity.

It must be admitted, however, that the lovely mountain scenery of Ajlun seemed to be wasted on the bedouins. Most of them came from the great rolling steppes of Arabia, and were used to warfare waged almost entirely on horse or camel back. When toiling over the rocky slopes of Jebel Ajlun, or breaking through the thick undergrowth where long thorns wound round their legs and branches slashed across their faces, they freely expressed their views on mountain dwellers in general and on gangsters in particular. But as soon as a shot rang out, the toil and weariness were forgotten, and the principal task was to hold them back.

*"I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips  
Straining upon the start—the game's afoot."*

The rebels held the desert "jundis" in quite particular dread, and vented their spite by calling them "gumlan" or "the lousies." But they always moved very rapidly if they heard that the lousies were coming.

It was a pleasure to see the dash of the troops in action and their proficiency with their weapons. The mountains, clothed with deep grass and carpeted with spring flowers, were a constant joy in their silent serenity, a glorious contrast to the activity and vindictiveness of man. Living in the open on the mountain slopes, surrounded by the fellowship and brotherhood of the troops,



these wretched two months had their moments of compensation.

Return to Amman, however, brought nothing but depression and anxiety. Here were hatred and suspicion, as so often occurs between non-combatants, much greater than existed between the troops and the gangs who were skirmishing in the hills. Nothing can be more distressing to such as have spent their lives in the service of the Arab race, than to hear base motives attributed to all their actions and tortuous designs deduced from every word they speak.

I had personally given twenty years of my life to the cause of Anglo-Arab friendship, a cause which seemed, in the spring of 1939, to be well-nigh lost. Further irony was added to the situation by the fact that Britain had not alienated the Arabs by her selfishness or greed, but by a piece of quixotic idealism—to re-establish the Chosen People in the Holy Land. The whole weary Palestine problem was just a piece of muddleheaded and vacillating idealism.

There was still so much to be done in Trans-Jordan. With the universal concentration on politics alone, there was no longer any time to give to the activities of the years of construction, the schools for the illiterate, the medical clinics for the poor, the importation of tractor ploughs, the education of the nomads in agriculture. There were still those children who were backward, those Roman masonry cisterns choked with earth—so much building up to be done.

The gangs never came back to Trans-Jordan. But already Germany was threatening Poland and demanding the annexation of Dantzig to the Reich. In Amman we started Air-raid Precautions and practised black-outs, while the last of the rebel gangs lurked on the banks of the Jordan, crossing backwards and forwards to avoid capture in either Palestine or Trans-Jordan.

The curtain was about to rise on a new act in the history of the Arab Legion—and of the world.

From April to August 1939, Palestine and Trans-Jordan lay in an uneasy lull. The Palestine rebellion had worn itself out in exhaustion and disillusionment, while the black clouds piling up in Europe foretold the approach of a new and mightier storm.

The gangs never returned to Trans-Jordan after the action at Beit Idis on April 24th, but many ex-rebels continued to hang about on the frontiers, particularly in the ravine of the Yermouk, which constituted the boundary between Trans-Jordan and Syria. Frontier areas are always good places for bandits. If they see the police approaching from one side they can always step across the frontier into the other country. Exact synchronization between the police forces of two countries is difficult to arrange, even if (as is often not the case) the two countries desire to co-operate.

The Yermouk ravine forms the frontier between Syria and Trans-Jordan for a distance of thirty miles from near the Hejaz Railway junction of Deraa, until it falls into the Jordan south of the Sea of Galilee. The stream of the Yermouk flows at the bottom of this ravine, which near its debouchment into the Jordan valley is in the bed of a gorge about 1,500 feet below the level of the plateau through which it has cut its way. The sides of the ravine are precipitous, in some places almost vertical, especially on the Trans-Jordan side. The main ravine receives on either side a whole network of tributary ravines sometimes running between steep slopes covered with scrub and trees, at others beneath vertical cliffs nearly 1,000 feet high. On the Trans-Jordan side particularly the spurs and ravines falling into the main Yermouk gorge are covered with thick scrub and dwarf oak, and strewn with boulders and outcrops of shelving rock. All the ravines contain numerous caves, some more and some less accessible.

Far down at the bottom of the main Yermouk gorge, the clear water of the stream twists round the spurs of rock and spins in clear pools overhung with bushes of pink oleanders. Beside the stream, sometimes running on a shelf of rock above the water, sometimes vanishing in a tunnel through a projecting spur, twists the single-line railway from Damascus, Amman and Deraa to Palestine.

No more ideal hiding-place for brigands can be imagined. The precipitous slopes, negotiable only in rare places by twisting goat-tracks, are almost impassable for troops. The thick undergrowth and frequent caves form ideal hiding-places. The flowing stream at the bottom of the ravine provides water without the

need for calling at villages or public wells, while the Deraa-Haifa railway line forms an ideal line of communication. The latter statement is no exaggeration. For the last two years of the Palestine disturbances, personnel, supplies and ammunition reached the rebel gangs in the Yermouk valley in the train from Damascus.

The ravine of the Yermouk was the base, supply depot and starting-point for the rebel gangs in Palestine during the latter half of the disturbances. The southern side of the ravine was Trans-Jordan, the northern was Syria, the stream at the bottom being the boundary. But before the ravine debouched into the Jordan valley, Palestine replaced Syria on the north side of the stream. Thus to clean up this natural nest of bandits required the co-operation of three Governments, an ideal completely unattainable during the disturbances. Indeed, the Franco-Syrian forces gave up trying to control this network of ravines, and retired to the top of the plateau on the north. The Palestine Government likewise withdrew from the mouth of the gorge and went back several miles to the banks of the Jordan. For the Arab Legion to have descended the steep southern slopes of the gorge to the Yermouk stream would have been to expose themselves to the fire of the gangs on the northern side of the water, which was Syrian territory. In view of this situation, the Arab Legion likewise retired to the top of the plateau on the south, and the whole network of ravines, like the Grand Canyon of Colorado, remained out of control for two years—the headquarters, base and resting-ground for the Palestine gangs. The gangs which invaded Trans-Jordan in March and April 1939 emerged from the Yermouk gorge.

With the final defeat of the gangs on the Ajlun mountains in the action at Beit Idis in April, the Arab Legion followed them to the Yermouk. Just as we had, in the old desert days, established law and order in the lava by clearing tracks through it, so we set to work on the Yermouk gorge with pick and shovel. In the six months from April to October 1939, the Arab Legion hacked thirty miles of track passable to motor vehicles down the precipitous slopes of the ravine, until both mechanized and horsed patrols were moving freely up and down the gorge and out through its mouth into the Jordan valley.

This done, two troops of the Desert Mechanized Force planted themselves in the middle of the gorge on the south bank of the stream, just above its mouth. Here they dug themselves in and surrounded themselves with wire. The Syrian frontier was only 200 yards away, the Palestinian 2,000. The ravine was so narrow that it was completely closed by the weapons of the post. This move put an end to the use of the Yermouk ravine as a nest for bandits.

As soon as the place was dug and wired, work was begun on the erection of a stone fort.

The site of this post was called by the Arabs Ash Shug Al Barid, or Cold Strip—another example of Arab sarcastic humour. Shut in between the high walls of the gorge and between the Yermouk stream and a marsh, and several hundred feet below sea-level, it was one of the hottest, most malarial and pestiferous spots I have seen in the Arab countries.

Soon after the Beit Idis action, the gang invasion of Trans-Jordan was officially called off. By the time the Arab Legion had cleaned up the Yermouk gorge and dug themselves in at Shug al Barid, we were already on quite friendly terms with many of the ex-rebels. Here there was little ill-feeling, as is so often the case between the men who have actually been fighting one another.

During the Palestine disturbances, firing at vehicles passing along the roads was one of the commonest activities of the rebels. To avoid casualties in these circumstances, a number of methods were devised for fixing armour plates along the sides of trucks carrying troops, to protect the occupants in the event of a sudden burst of firing. The Palestine Police had improvised armoured cars manufactured by Wagner's, a German firm in Jaffa.

This gave me an idea also, and when the gangs invaded Trans-Jordan, I approached Wagner to make armoured cars for the Arab Legion. We agreed to buy six, but production delays were such that operations against the gangs were over before the armoured cars were delivered.

I was sitting one evening with His Highness the Amir in a tent which had been pitched on the hill behind the palace. The side of the tent facing the east had been thrown open. Below us was

the grey roof of the palace, surrounded by plantations of pine and fir trees. Far away to the east the sky was a pale primrose.

The Amir Tellal appeared, walking quickly across the short turf. As he sat down, he turned to his father and said: "Armoured cars have arrived for the Arab Legion." His Highness was incredulous and looked at me uncertainly. How quiet and peaceful a little town was Amman in the summer of 1939. Armoured cars seemed infinitely remote and unreal in that still, clear, sunset air. "Some people say they are made only of cardboard," said Prince Tellal provocatively. His Highness looked at me enquiringly. "We had six armoured cars made of steel, not cardboard," I said. "May God bless you!" said His Highness. "Though I hope we shall never use them."

But we did—for it was already August 1939, and the German armies were massing for the onslaught on Poland.

In August 1938 I had been married, and on October 18th, 1939, five weeks after war was declared, a son was born to us in Jerusalem. We were advised to christen him David, because he was born in the city of King David. We decided to call him Godfrey, after Godfrey de Bouillon, the first Crusader King of Jerusalem. But when we brought him back to Amman, His Highness declared that he must have an Arab name. He called him Faris, which means knight or cavalier, a name which accorded well enough with Godfrey de Bouillon.

Arabs are very proud of parentage, and often call themselves fathers of their children. Henceforward I was known as the "Father of Faris."

# XIII

## *The Storm Breaks*

"O England, full of sin but most of sloth;  
Spit out thy phlegm and fill thy breast with glory."

GEORGE HERBERT (1593-1633)



## THE STORM BREAKS

WHEN war was declared in Europe in September 1939, the Arabs of Palestine were worn out by three and a half years of hostilities, a period almost as exhausting for them as a European war to the Great Powers. The mountains and the frontier areas still contained many ex-gangsters and rebels, who were living the lives of bandits and fugitives.

Curiously enough, more hatred of Great Britain was bred in the cities of Damascus and Baghdad than seemed to exist in Palestine itself. For the extremist leaders had taken refuge in the other Arab cities, where they were carrying on intensive propaganda. Moreover, the Germans were already active in Syria and Iraq, and were abetting this hostile activity. Britain had perhaps never before been so unpopular amongst the Arabs as she was in the autumn of 1939, as the aftermath of the Palestine disturbances.

Rumours were also rife to the effect that Ibn Saud had concluded a secret treaty with Hitler, and was only biding his time to declare openly for the enemy. Subsequent events completely refuted these reports, but in the first six months of war they caused some alarm and anxiety in other Arab States.

Amid so many anxieties, uncertainties and misgivings, little Trans-Jordan stood firm, and spoke with no hesitation or uncertainty in her voice. His Highness cabled to Great Britain, pledging all the resources of his State in her support. It is ironical to remember, now that the whole struggle is over, that His Majesty's Government replied by thanking His Highness, but pointing out that this war would be fought out in Europe. There was consequently no necessity for the adoption of extraordinary measures in the Arab countries. In the summer of 1939, I was the only British officer in the Arab Legion. Just before war was declared, Lash joined me. He had been with us for four years before, but



had taken a staff appointment in Palestine in 1938. He took over my former work as commander of the desert, now that I was commanding the whole Arab Legion.

The winter 1939-40 passed uneasily, with Poland overthrown and the Western Front static. Syria was restless under French control, but unable to move in the presence of a large French garrison. German propaganda was gaining ground in Baghdad.

Meanwhile, the Arab Legion itself was waiting. Of the additional forces built up during the Palestine disturbances, the cavalry squadrons were engaged in patrolling the frontiers of Syria and Palestine, against the flotsam of ex-rebels and bandits who still haunted the valleys of the Yermouk and the Jordan. The Desert Mechanized Force, 350 strong, now reinforced by the six "home-made" armoured cars, took advantage of the lull to improve their somewhat incomplete training.

Then came the swift blows of the spring of 1940, the invasion of Norway, the overthrow of Holland and Belgium, the collapse of France and the Italian declaration of war. A few months before, we had been told that the war would be restricted to Europe and no abnormal measures would be needed in Arabia. Now we suddenly found ourselves in the front line. A Germano-Italian armistice commission arrived to take over the Governments of Syria and the Lebanon, and German officers were reported on the Syrian frontier, staring impudently at our little country, where for so many years we had lived and worked so quietly and happily amongst our people.

Then one day soon after the fall of France, Mr. Anthony Eden and General Wavell (as he then was) arrived in Amman by air. They interviewed His Highness, and then, in a quiet room of the British Residency, they told us that every single man counted. The Italians were about to advance from Cyrenaica on Egypt. Although the Germans were appearing in Syria, the British Army must needs go to the Western Desert. To defend 250 miles of frontier with Syria, Trans-Jordan had, apart from the police and gendarmerie, about 600 soldiers. A troop of the Desert Mechanized Force was paraded on the airfield for General Wavell to see. It was agreed that the Force be doubled immediately and formed into a Mechanized Regiment. The British Army would supply

the weapons and equipment. This decision at least provided work and activity, which was preferable to the previous uncertainty and waiting.

Meanwhile hostilities had commenced in the Western Desert, and His Highness had asked the British Army to accept a contingent of his forces at the front. In reply, he was asked to lend a company of infantry to guard an important aerodrome in Palestine. We collected a company of 200 infantry and sent them to Palestine, with the proud title of the 1st Infantry Company of the Arab Legion.

At the beginning of the war, with British prestige at so low an ebb after the Palestine disturbances, many pessimists prophesied that any reverses suffered by Great Britain would be the sign for all Arabs to take their revenge on her. To their great honour be it recorded, however, that the people of Trans-Jordan, and even many of the Arabs of Palestine, reacted in precisely the opposite manner. The overwhelming nature of the Allied disasters, the successive collapses of Poland, Holland, Belgium and France, and the prospect of Britain isolated but defiant, produced an immediate emotional reaction in her favour, although in July 1940 few of the inhabitants of Trans-Jordan dared to hope that Britain would survive.

In peace-time there were always sneerers who said that Trans-Jordan supported Great Britain because she knew which side her bread was buttered. The same people used to complain of the ingratitude of the Egyptians, who opposed the British in spite of all the money they had made out of them. Cynicism may not be a crime, but it is most certainly a mistake. The experience of life teaches us that money is but a superficial incentive, and mercenary motives cannot produce heroism. With the Arabs in particular, it is vital to remember the existence of a capacity for passionate and heroic courage concealed beneath their everyday venality. The Byzantines made the mistake of forgetting this no less than the Turks and the British. All of a sudden appears a cause or a leader possessing the flaming quality which can inspire the exalted courage that lies hidden deep in the Arab character. Suddenly they throw away money in disgust or exaltation, and develop a

courage which staggers, if it does not sweep away, their astonished opponents.

This is, indeed, yet one more quality in which the Arabs resemble the British. For their enemies always calculate, before war begins, that the British are degenerate and money-loving. But when the crisis comes, they cast off their lethargy, and rise to heroism and sacrifice which throw into confusion the carefully calculated plans of their enemies. Being themselves of this disposition, the British should not make the mistake of underestimating the heroic qualities of the Arabs because they seem to be indifferent or venal in peace-time.

The people of Trans-Jordan had enjoyed good times since they went into partnership with Britain, and most of them appreciated the fact. In the course of twenty years of partnership, many friendships and loyalties had been built up, and feelings of mutual respect, even of affection, had bound members of the two races together. When she saw her big friend, battered and bleeding, stand up alone to face the bully, little Trans-Jordan stepped fearlessly into the ring beside her. In earlier days, Arab Nationalists had not hesitated at times to sneer at Trans-Jordan's subservience to the so-called "Imperialists." But all sneers were silenced at this moment, for every Arab believed that Britain was lost and that the Germans would be in Syria in two months, and would wreak a terrible vengeance on Trans-Jordan and her ruler, whose bold stand had already evoked the daily sneers and sarcasms of the Berlin radio. But whatever were her relations to other countries, Trans-Jordan had found in Britain a genuine friend, and the old spirit of these Arabs was too proud to abandon in her direst need the friend who had helped them in better days.

The attitude of the French in Syria was more complex. Perhaps they were still stunned by the suddenness of their catastrophe. Some professed to be extremely friendly, and declared that a British victory was the only hope for France. Others were no less hostile, and gleefully foretold the early ruin of perfidious Albion.

One day late in 1940, four deserters from the French Foreign Legion crossed the frontier from the Jebel Druze into Trans-Jordan. They were pursued by a troop of Syrian cavalry, under the command of a French officer, and were eventually overtaken

and arrested seven kilometres inside the frontier of Trans-Jordan. At this juncture, two camelmen of the Arab Legion Desert Patrol arrived, and were fired on by the Syrian cavalry, one of their riding camels being killed.

An engagement ensued between two men of the Arab Legion on the one hand and forty-five Syrian cavalry under a French officer on the other. Eventually the French broke off the action and retired to the Syrian frontier. They were rumoured to have suffered casualties, although the figures could not be ascertained, but they left two dead horses behind them. It was at the time of the Battle of Britain, and I find noted in my diary: "The Arab Legion men gave quite as good as they got although their numbers were two against 45, odds worthy of the Royal Air Force."

Many years later, when the war was over and won, a party of Arab notables of Amman told me of how they felt in the darkest days of 1940 and 1941. "Whenever the news of some fresh disaster was received," they said, "we used to think of an excuse to call on the three or four British officials who still remained in Amman. We wanted to see how they were taking it, in order to guess what hope was left.

"Then we would reassemble again to compare notes," they told me. One would say: "Kirkbride seems much the same as usual. Foote was in rather a humorous vein. Glubb was doing his normal routine. These English must have some knowledge we don't possess. Everything seems lost and yet they are unperturbed. Obviously they have some secret information. Things cannot really be so bad."

We were, of course, all unconscious of this scrutiny, and any imperturbability we showed must have been due to instinctive British lethargy. Kirkbride was, indeed, a tower of strength, alike in body and spirit. If the mountains had been taken up and cast into the sea, he would still have arrived at the office at eight in the morning and gone home to lunch at one. When I broke to him the news of the collapse of Belgium, his only comment was: "Well! Can you beat it?"

Perhaps because I am half-Irish and half-Cornish, I was less placid. How often, in those days, when the German armies were pouring over Belgium and northern France, did I wake up before

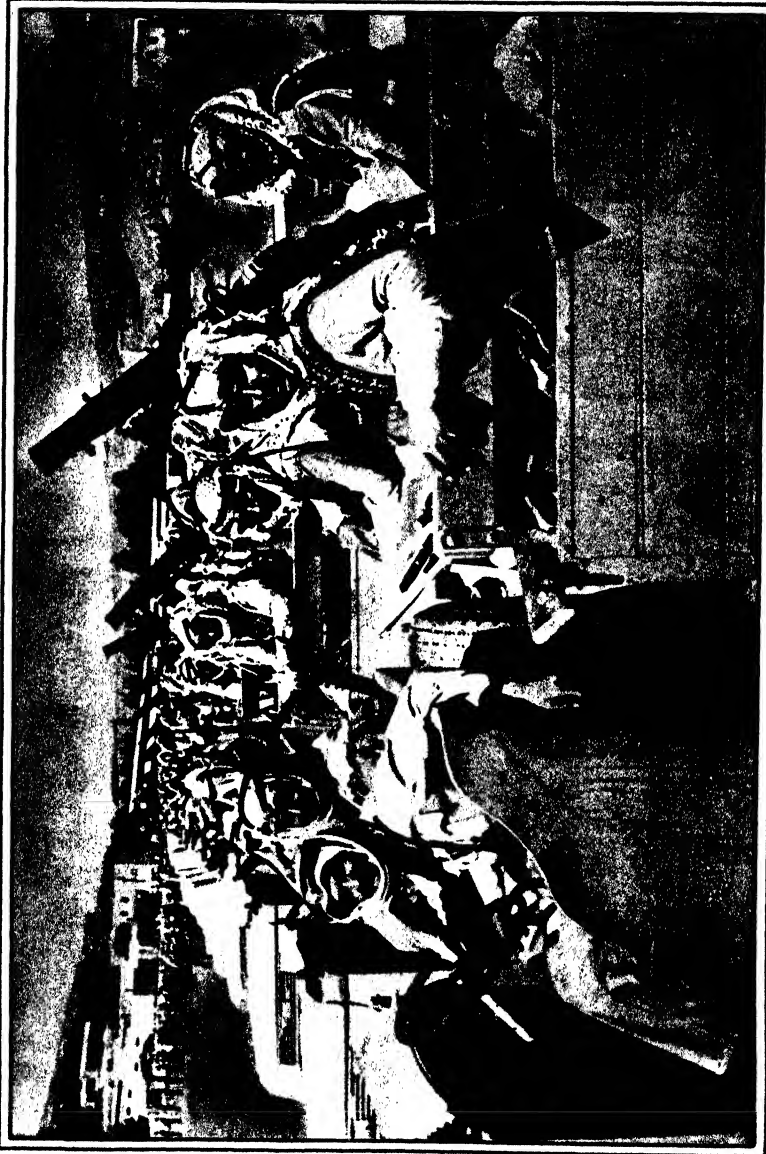
dawn, and getting up, kneel down beside my bed and pray: "O God! Save my country! O my Lord! I beg Thee to save England!"

In February 1941 Herr Von Hentig visited Syria. He was said to be the head of the Middle East Department of the German Foreign Office. He certainly seemed to be a man of energy. He interviewed a great many Arabs in Damascus and spent money freely. The German Army, he told them, was absolutely invincible, and would be occupying Syria in two or three months. The Turks would not resist and Britain was done for. When the Germans occupied Syria, Persia and Afghanistan would join the Axis and India would revolt.

The majority of the people of Syria were praying for a British occupation of their country. French and Italian prestige had fallen very low. The Germans were, however, regarded with fear and respect. Scarcely had Von Hentig left Syria, when strikes, riots and disturbances spread over the country. To what extent he had fired the train which caused the explosion, it is not possible to say, but it seems by no means improbable that he came to put the final touches to the plans for outbreaks in Iraq and Syria.

Meanwhile a *coup d'état* had taken place in Baghdad, the Regent, Prince Abdullilah, was a fugitive, and the pro-German military party had seized power. Everywhere disaster followed disaster. The Germans were overwhelming Greece and were advancing rapidly in Cyrenaica. Every Arab believed that it was a question of weeks, if not of days, before the Germans occupied the Middle East and the British were swept away.

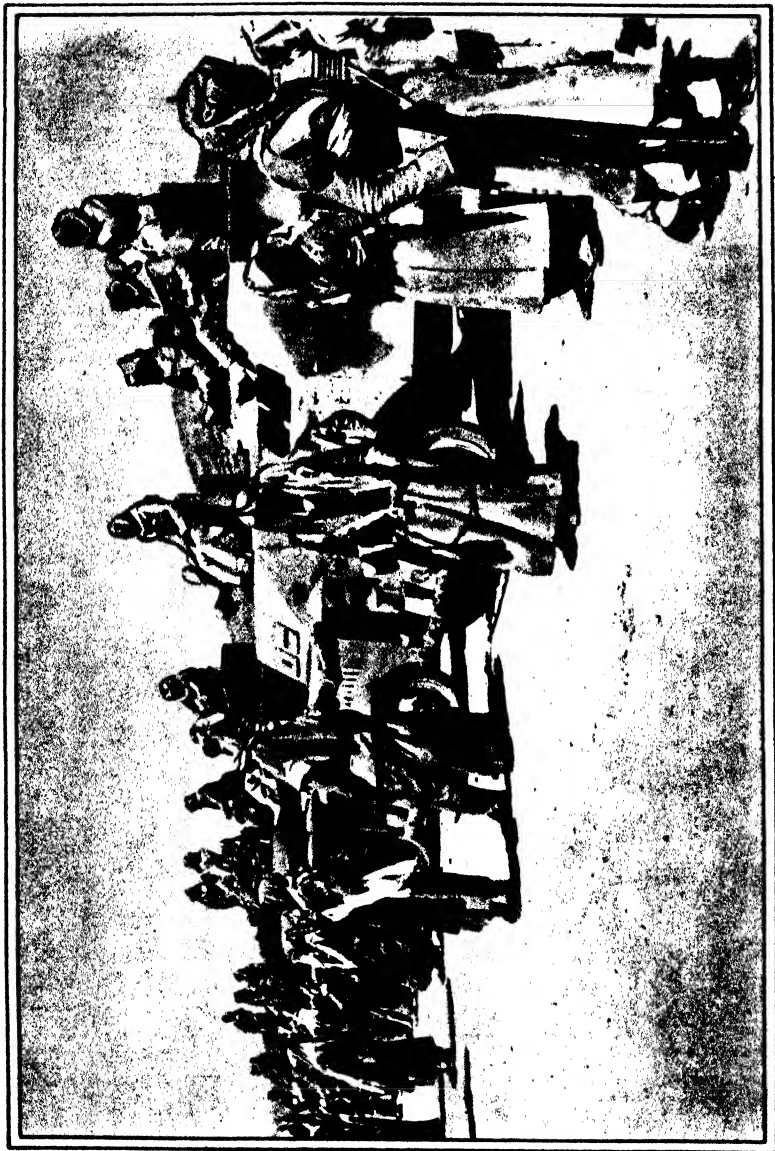
Events followed one another with increasing rapidity. In April the *coup d'état* Government in Baghdad declared war on Great Britain, and the Iraqi Army besieged the R.A.F. cantonment at Habbaniya. There were many British officers and officials in Iraq who spoke Arabic well and knew the country intimately, but the illegal Iraq Government had taken care to arrest them. Thus when it was decided to organize a column in Palestine to cross the Syrian desert and relieve the siege of Habbaniya, I was asked to accompany it as "political officer." On arrival in Iraq, I was to place myself in touch with elements still loyal to the



Photograph by George Roger  
Courtesy, "Life" Magazine

Our force was carried in Ford trucks armed with Lewis guns

NEW WAR SALARIES



Photograph by George Roger  
Courtesy "Life" Magazine

We had with us four of our home-made armoured cars

Regent and his party, and to assist in organizing their resistance to the usurping Government. The British Army had apparently not recognized the Arab Legion as a military force, in spite of the name of the Mechanized Regiment. It was as an escort to myself that I obtained permission to take the Mechanized Regiment with us.

I was summoned to Jerusalem to see the newly arrived G.O.C., General Sir Henry Wilson (later Field-Marshal Lord Wilson). As we were shown into his upstairs office in the King David Hotel, I saw "Jumbo" for the first time. He had just commanded the catastrophic expedition to Greece. Iraq had declared war. The Germans were in Syria. Palestine was denuded of troops.

"More trouble, I am afraid!" said Jumbo as we entered the room, smiling from ear to ear, exactly like a picture I remembered in my childhood of the Cheshire cat. Jumbo smiled with the most playful expression, as though he would like to dig us all in the ribs and wink. "More trouble, gentlemen, I am afraid!"

The plans for Habforce, the column to relieve Habbaniya, were discussed. "Will the Arab Legion fight?" enquired the General. "The Arab Legion will fight anybody," I answered confidently. Were not these my brothers in arms, with whom I had lived for ten years past? We left the conference room, and set out for Trans-Jordan and the desert, where the Desert Mechanized Regiment had already moved on ahead.

The Regent of Iraq had arrived in Jerusalem, accompanied by Nuri Pasha Said and leading Iraqi statesmen. He was anxious to get to work, and complained of British slowness. In Amman I took leave of His Highness, and set out to seek the Desert Mechanized Regiment, who were already at the Iraq Petroleum Company's pumping station at H4. The game was afoot.<sup>1</sup>

I arrived at H4 to find the troops sitting about on the ground close to the slit trenches which they had dug round the Iraq Petroleum Company's compound. The air was hot and still, except for an occasional whirlwind which blew through the camp, causing dust, dirty paper and cigarette ends to whirl up into the air in a whistling spiral. There were no tents and no shade, and

<sup>1</sup> For the ensuing operations, see map inside back cover.



the soldiers, grey with dust, sat all day long in the glare of the sun or crawled on all-fours under the shade of their vehicles.

The desert at H<sub>4</sub> is monotonously flat, and the arrival of military forces and vehicles had churned the surface into deep powdery dust. Bathing accommodation was inadequate, and life was dominated by dust. Soft yellow dust filled one's clothes, covered faces and hands, lay thick on the food, and drifted perpetually through the air. Since the declaration of war by the usurping Government of Baghdad, the Kirkuk oil-fields had been occupied by the enemy, and oil was no longer being pumped down the pipeline. Most of the oil company personnel had been evacuated, and their formerly green cheerful gardens had been trampled down and covered with dust. A child's teddy-bear was lying in a flower-bed, forgotten perhaps in the hurry of evacuation.

I had scarcely been a few hours at H<sub>4</sub> when I was recalled once more by air to Jerusalem. I had had no time to see or speak to the troops. "Jumbo" Wilson was still sitting in his office chair and still smiling. The British relief column would not be ready to leave Palestine for Iraq for several days to come. Meanwhile the Arab Legion was to advance on the Iraq frontier and cover the concentration of the British troops at H<sub>4</sub>. The frontier was fifty-five miles east of H<sub>4</sub>, and a further eighty-five miles beyond the frontier was Rutbah. There a massive stone fort, built over a well in the desert, blocked the road to Baghdad. It was situated about half-way between Trans-Jordan and the Euphrates. Surrounded by high masonry walls with a single massive gate, it was garrisoned by about one hundred officers and men of the Iraqi police. We were to capture Rutbah if we could, in order to save time. If we were successful, the British column when it was ready would be able to drive straight across the desert to the relief of Habbaniya, without being delayed by operations in mid-desert. The R.A.F. would support us by bombing Rutbah. I returned to H<sub>4</sub> by air with this task to fulfil.

The detachment of the Arab Legion which was concentrated at H<sub>4</sub> was the Desert Mechanized Force, rechristened, since General Wavell's visit, the Desert Mechanized Regiment. This, indeed, was the only change it had undergone, for although we had recruited up to the newly authorized strength of a regiment,

the British Army had been unable to supply us with any weapons or vehicles. Thus we left behind us 300 men in Trans-Jordan because we had no trucks to carry them. The force which actually set out consisted only of the 350 men of the Desert Mechanized Force who two years before had fought the rebel gangs in the mountains of Ajlun.

Our force was carried in Ford trucks purchased by us direct from America. The men were armed with rifles and a number of Vickers and Lewis machine-guns, all veterans of the First World War. We also had with us four of our "home-made" armoured cars. We had no artillery or even mortars.

Lash with an Arab Legion patrol in trucks had already crossed the Iraqi frontier and had chased and captured a truck containing a number of Iraqi tribesmen. They admitted that they had been sent by the garrison of Rutbah to obtain information of our movements.

It was agreed that we should move to H<sub>3</sub>, the next station on the pipeline, forty-five miles beyond the Iraqi frontier. We left H<sub>4</sub> after lunch, at the hottest time of the day. The flat desert shimmered in the heat haze, while here and there twisting dust-devils sped across the plain ahead. The metal parts of the car in the sun were too hot to touch with the hand.

The sun was low on the horizon and the air was cooling pleasantly when we topped a gentle rise and saw in front of us, first the top of the water-tower and then the roofs of the buildings of the Iraq Petroleum Company's settlement. Our column had all arrived before sunset. We cooked dinners, posted our pickets and sentries, and lay down on the desert to sleep.



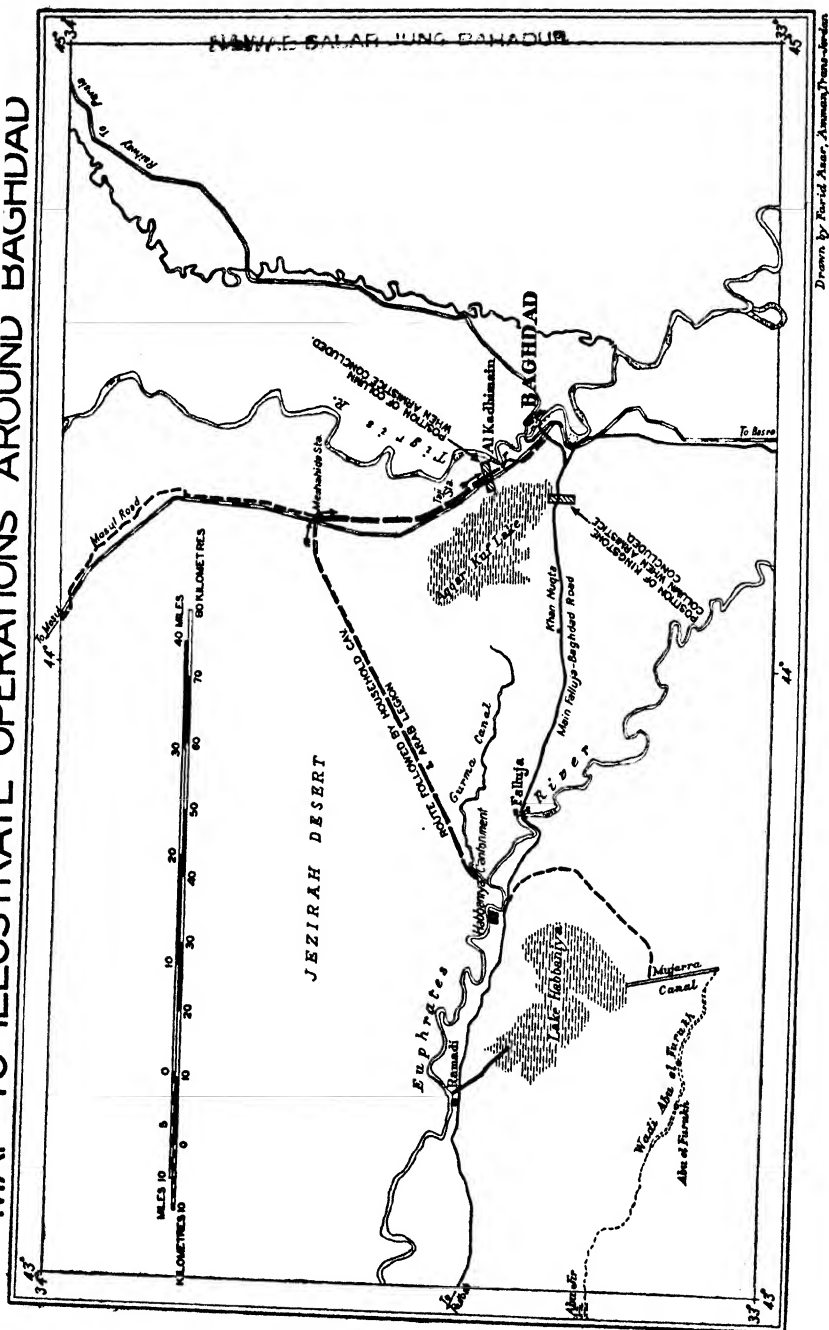
# XIV

## *The Path of Honour*

“Forward, brave champions, to the fight!  
Sound trumpets! God defend the right!”

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

# MAP 10 ILLUSTRATE OPERATIONS AROUND BAGHDAD



Drawn by David Auer, American Press-Photo

## XIV

### THE PATH OF HONOUR

I AWOKE in the pale stillness of the desert dawn. The air was cool and fresh. The surface of the desert was covered with black pebbles which made lumps under my blankets. I sat up and looked about. The trucks were parked untidily all around, facing different directions. The ground between the vehicles was covered with men sleeping, twisted up in their blankets. Farther out, the sentries were patrolling round the bivouac.

I sat thinking for a few minutes, and then wriggled out of my blankets and, stepping over sleeping forms, went to find the sergeant of the guard. Soon the whistle was blowing and the men sitting up in their blankets and rubbing their eyes.

It had been agreed that we were to dump our heavy stuff at H3, and go on another thirty-five miles over the desert to reconnoitre the Iraqi fort at Rutbah. The R.A.F. were to support us from the air. Leaving a rear party with our rations and stores, we set out with some two hundred men in fifteen trucks. Traveling in extended V-formations over the open desert, each vehicle a little black dot with a long yellow eddying cloud of dust behind it, we looked considerably more formidable and important than we were.

We again halted and established a base on a little table-mountain hill three miles west of the fort over a flat plain, and then, remounting our vehicles, we threw a loose line round the fort, picketing the high ground all around, and sat down to wait for the aircraft. There were believed to be about 100 police in the fort, a few of them desert police with whom I myself worked when I was in the service of the Iraqi Government. One of our sergeants even had a brother inside the fort.

The aircraft duly arrived, dropped a few bombs and flew round and round for a short time. Then one of them flew down lower and lower, circled again, flew past just over our heads and dropped

a message to the effect that the fort was ready to surrender and was showing a white flag. This war was too easy. We had not yet fired a shot. I jumped into my car, and drove up to within 200 yards of the gate, followed by two trucks crowded with men. But the gate remained obstinately closed, the high stone walls frowned upon us in silence. The optimistic pilot had meanwhile flown back to H<sub>4</sub> to spread the happy news that Rutbah was captured.

As the garrison showed no signs of surrendering, we retired somewhat discomfited, and sent a peevish wireless signal to H<sub>4</sub> to the effect that the fort was not at all willing to surrender. We asked the aircraft to come back and commence bombing. Hitherto there had been no firing and indeed no sign of life from the fort. Armed as we were only with small arms, there was nothing we could do against its high masonry walls. As I was standing with a few others looking at the fort from a hillock some 300 yards away, a machine-gun suddenly stuttered from the ramparts, and the bullets whistled round. A man standing by me was wounded in the hand. We dropped into a wadi behind the hill. The campaign had begun.

After two hours a single aircraft reappeared, circled round, and dropped a bomb which missed the fort. The garrison fired heavily with small arms. In the afternoon another aircraft came over, and again dropped a bomb, which fell harmlessly in the desert. The garrison maintained a lively small-arms fire on the aircraft. We lay down to sleep in disgust—this was not such fun, after all.

The next day passed monotonously in the same manner. The R.A.F. still failed to hit the fort. Later we heard that one of the aircraft had been hit by small-arms fire and crashed on the way home, killing the squadron-leader. This reverse gave rise to a curious incident, for the Baghdad Broadcasting Station immediately reported that I had been killed. The report was repeated by Berlin and, without any apparent attempt to confirm its truth, by the B.B.C. from London. Some of the British papers even published an obituary.

On the afternoon of the second day, I wrote a note to the garrison, in Arabic, saying that they had done their duty, and

could now surrender without dishonour before they suffered heavier losses. I sent the note up to the door by a tribesman; but the garrison refused to open the door of the fort or to accept the message. Doubtless they already knew that relief was on the way.

At dusk the same evening, we were lying on the ground three or four hundred yards from the fort, when away to the east we saw a Very light rise and fall. A few seconds later, a green light was fired in response from the fort. After half an hour a large convoy of vehicles appeared advancing up the road from Baghdad. Guessing that the main gates of the fort would be opened for the relief column, we drew nearer under cover of the growing darkness, and fired bursts of machine-gun fire towards the gates. We counted nearly forty vehicles. From the fort and the relief column came loud cheers and singing, and a *feu-de-joie* of rifle shots and Very lights. We continued to fire into the darkness, towards what we imagined must be the crowd in the gateway.

At last all was silent again. The relief column was inside the fort, and the same old masonry walls loomed black in the night. We drew off to our base three miles to the west to have some dinner. I weighed up the situation. We had hoped to take Rutbah fort without fighting so that the British column would not be delayed when it arrived, but the job had proved tougher than we expected. Now that the relief column had arrived, the enemy was probably twice our strength, and we were completely isolated. As far as we knew, the British column was still in Palestine, 300 miles away. There were no reinforcements between us and them.

To engage an enemy twice our strength, in the middle of the desert, with no support for 300 miles, seemed to me an unnecessary risk. The main column would be along in three or four days anyhow, and could deal with Rutbah in a couple of hours, because it would have guns. I decided to slip away and fall back to H3 to meet the main column. We sent a few men to fire bursts at the fort for half an hour to keep the enemy employed, and we pulled out in the dark and set off westwards across the desert.

It was already daylight on the morning of May 10th, 1941, when our column came once more in sight of H3. We were pleasantly surprised to find No. 2 R.A.F. armoured-car company



there. They had been sent up to our support, pending the arrival of the main column.

The imperturbable Cassano was in command of the armoured cars. I explained the situation to him, the ineffectiveness of the bombing and the arrival of the relief column from Baghdad. Cassano decided to go on to Rutbah and see the position for himself. I promised to signal H4 to send him air support, but he did not seem particularly interested.

It turned out that the relief column consisted of trucks armed with machine-guns. Half of them were under Fauzi al Qawukchi, a man who had acquired a considerable reputation as a guerilla leader in the Palestine rebellion, while the other half of the column consisted of Iraqi Desert Police. Cassano's armoured cars fought an action with them outside Rutbah fort the same day. The engagement did not appear decisive, but, nevertheless, the relief column disappeared again to the east the same night, abandoning the garrison of Rutbah to its fate.

While Cassano was skirmishing with the enemy outside the fort at Rutbah, we spent the day at H3 refilling with petrol, water and rations, and maintaining our vehicles. We had promised to rejoin Cassano outside the fort next morning. Having made all arrangements to move off next day, we lay down once more on the pebbly desert and slept the sleep of exhaustion.

The wireless operators had been busy during this stationary day, receiving signals from officers and men who had been left behind. Perhaps the best of them read as follows:

"From: Sergeant Ali Dehham, Mudawara Fort.

"I beg you to send orders for me to join your force, O father of Faris. Am unable to stay behind while you follow the path of honour."

All were astir early the next morning. We had sorted all our kit the day before. The surplus gear was to return to H4. The remainder was loaded on to our trucks. Soon all was ready. We threw our blankets on to our vehicles, climbed on board, and the column pulled out of H3, and headed across the rolling desert for Rutbah. Behind us the troops broke out into a gay song of battle. Before us lay the wide rolling desert. Thus gaily did we set out on the path of honour.

If the spirits of the garrison of Rutbah had been elated by the arrival of Fauzi's relief column, they were equally depressed by his retreat twenty-four hours later after the engagement with Cassano's armoured cars. The same night the R.A.F. tried a night bombing, and succeeded in dropping some bombs into the fort. This combination of reverses was too much for the garrison. Later in the night of May 10th-11th, 1941, the garrison slipped out in the darkness. When day dawned on May 11th, the imperturbable Cassano, still skirmishing on the plains outside, noticed that the great gate of the fort was standing ajar.

Shortly afterwards, the Arab Legion column arrived once more. The fort was garrisoned by fifty of our men. The inside of the great fort was in incredible dirt and confusion, everything was smashed, torn and overturned. A smell of filth pervaded the building. The rest of the day was spent trying to clean the place up, restore a certain amount of order, and make arrangements for the garrison of the fort before we went on to Iraq.

The British column reached Rutbah in the evening, thirty-six hours later. The total force which had left Palestine with the task of relieving Habbaniya consisted of a brigade of the First Cavalry Division formed by the Household Cavalry Regiment and two regiments of Yeomanry. The two Yeomanry regiments were, however, employed on guarding our lines of communication across the desert, and only the Household Cavalry Regiment (the Life Guards and the Blues) came on to Iraq. There was also a battalion of the Essex Regiment, a battery of field artillery and a troop of 2-pounder anti-tank guns. The force of the Arab Legion which left Rutbah for Iraq, after leaving patrols and garrisons at H4 and Rutbah, was 250 strong. The column was, however, immensely impeded and delayed by an R.A.S.C. transport company of 200 3-ton trucks, heavily laden with rations, water and petrol, not only for the column itself, but for the beleaguered garrison of Habbaniya. The whole force taking part in the operation, including the Yeomanry, had been christened Habforce and was commanded by Major-General Clark. The flying column which was to go on ahead to relieve Habbaniya had been called Kingcol, its commander being Brigadier Kingstone. It consisted of the following troops:

The Household Cavalry Regiment.

Two companies of the Essex Regiment.

One battery of 25-pounders.

One troop of 2-pounders.

200 three-ton trucks, R.A.S.C.

250 all ranks of the Arab Legion.

In front of us lay the Iraqi Army, with a war establishment of three divisions.

Brigadier Kingstone arrived in the evening of May 12th. We talked for a short time in the partly looted dining-room of the Rutbah hostel, which had formerly catered for passengers of the trans-desert car services between Baghdad and Damascus. Regular soldiers are always apt to regard amateurs or irregulars with some suspicion, and the staff of Kingcol formed no exception.

My instructions from His Majesty's Government had been to accompany the column as far as the Euphrates, but once arrived in Iraq, I had a roving commission of my own. My task was to establish touch with all those who supported His Royal Highness the Regent, and to organize resistance against the usurping Government of Baghdad. Even while crossing the desert, I was to accompany the column but was not under its command. I was surprised to find in Rutbah that Brigadier Kingstone seemed to be unaware of my instructions. He was relieved to hear from me that I was a civilian and did not aspire to command British troops.

Soldiers are always extremely particular about seniority and the chain of command—doubtless rightly, for disaster can scarcely fail to overtake a force which has competing rival commanders. It is, therefore, no little testimony both to General Clark and to Brigadier Kingstone that I and the Arab Legion operated with them for nearly three months, during which time I was never under their orders but always formed virtually an integral part of the columns they commanded. Such a system on a campaign might seem to be inviting friction and jealousy, and yet during three months of operations not so much as an impatient word ever passed between us.

On the morning of May 13th, Kingcol left Rutbah for Hab-

baniya. The Arab Legion led the way, preceding the column by several miles. I was unable to decide whether this post was offered to us in order to enable us to guide the column and act as advanced guard, or whether the Brigadier's principal idea was to get us as far away as possible from his column.

The desert air was clear and cool in the early morning, and our spirits were high at being on the move at last, after the filth and confusion of Rutbah. Three troops in 8-cwt. Ford pick-ups, which we called scout cars, were speeding away ahead of us, extended in V formation across the open desert. Every time we approached a hill or a rise in the ground, one of the scout cars sped on ahead and pulled up at its foot. A scout jumped out, ran up the hillock, fell on his face, and lay peering through his binoculars, then ran down the hill doubled up, held his rifle vertically above his head to signal "No enemy in sight," jumped in the car again, and shot off like an arrow with a long trail of dust billowing out behind the car. While the British Army was doubtless incomparably better trained for battle, we were unequalled at this fast desert scouting technique.

As we sped over the open flats of Umm Talaiha, a single aircraft appeared overhead and began to circle. We could hear him firing a machine-gun, but could not see where his fire was going. Then suddenly a series of flashes and spurts of smoke from the head of the column showed that the enemy had dropped his bombs. A few minutes later the aircraft flew away and was seen no more. One of our scout cars had overturned and an N.C.O. had been killed. The driver's leg was broken. The column went on, and I stayed behind with two soldiers to bury the dead man where he had fallen.

When we made a long halt for lunch, the atmosphere had already become oppressively hot, and the desert was white and glaring. We sat in the shade half underneath our trucks, and drank little cups of tea. At sunset the whole column bivouacked on both sides of the road, some twenty-five miles west of Ramadi. We had still no exact location for Fauzi al Qawukchi's column, which had retired eastwards from Rutbah after its battle with Cassano. He was reported to have gone south to Nukhaib, a desert fort which I myself had founded twelve years earlier.

At 9.30 in the evening of May 13th a conference was held by the Brigadier to decide on the operations for the next day. The column was to start early in the morning and drive into Habbaniya, which, it appeared, was no longer closely beleaguered. The Brigadier suggested that the Arab Legion do a reconnaissance somewhere. It was difficult to avoid the impression that he wanted us somewhere out of the way while his troops rescued the besieged cantonment.

As usual, I woke early the next morning, while the grey dawn was spreading over the desert. A little soft breeze was blowing from the west. A mile or so to the north lay the Muhammadiyat Wadis, while the bituminous springs at Abu Jir were not far away to the south. I sat up in my blankets, my chin on my knees, and thought of my home in Amman, and what lay before us. Soon the troops were up, and we watched the British column draw away to the south-east for Habbaniya. Then we jumped on to our trucks and drove away to the north until we emerged on a high ridge, and there suddenly opened before us at our very feet the swirling brown tide of the mighty Euphrates. The great river twisted and wound between banks of green fields. Here and there were pitched groups of black tents, around which grazed flocks of sheep and horses. The bright green grass and the grazing flocks combined to form a pastoral scene of peace and rustic simplicity, which seemed to us all the more lovely after a fortnight in the dusty glare of the desert. Turning southwards, we could see that the banks of the river, at this season in flood, had been broken, and the Euphrates had spread into a vast lake as far as the eye could see, the date palms of Ramadi seeming to rise out of the waters.

We had no rôle to play this day, and nothing to do but to kill time. Having spent half an hour admiring the view and having thus assured ourselves that no enemy threatened the column from the north, we turned back again, crossed the rear of the column and prepared to take up a position to cover it from the south. After all, it was in that direction that Fauzi had been last reported.

We moved to Abu al Furukh, a group of water-holes in a wide sandy wadi of the same name. We were covering the centre of the column's line of march on its south side. After putting out scouts,

we sat down by the water-holes to while away the day. The water proved to be very salt and made extremely nasty tea. We told stories, discussed the situation desultorily, made nasty tea and dozed. I was told later that it was 120° F. in the shade; but it did not matter much at Abu al Furukh because there was not any shade. It certainly seemed oppressively hot after the cool, breezy hills of Trans-Jordan. The sand was burning, it was impossible to touch metal exposed to the sun, and the white glare of the desert made it painful to open one's eyes.

Twenty years before, I had ridden past these water-holes. We had started from Ramadi for a visit to the oasis of Rahaliya, a few miles farther south. I was riding my chestnut pony, with two local tribesmen of the Duleim, and a small boy on a camel to carry our kit. How well I remembered it all—how we bought fresh green lucerne in Rahaliya for our horses and how much that camel ate, and how we had dinner in the baronial guest-hall of Chyad ibn Shahir, the Shaikh of Rahaliya.

Shitatha oasis touched Rahaliya on the south. It was the Spring of Dates, the first outpost of Iraq captured by the early Muslims. From there Khalid ibn al Waleed had captured Anbar, the ruined mounds of which lay west of us on the Euphrates. Doubtless Khalid himself and those early Muslim warriors had passed by Abu al Furukh, burning with love of Paradise. Khalid's army was our only predecessor in history, in that it also had crossed the whole desert to attack Iraq. But they travelled on camels and horses, we luxuriously in cars (or if not luxuriously at least more rapidly). Still, it was striking to think of us as the successors of Khalid—the sword of Allah.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, we decided that the British column must all be safely inside Habbaniya by now, so we picked up the kettle and tea-cups, and climbed on to our trucks. We agreed to drive due north until we struck the tracks of the column going from west to east, and then to follow them into Habbaniya. We drove northwards over slightly undulating sandyish soil, until we calculated that we should be striking the tracks of the column. There could be no question of missing the tracks of 500 vehicles, of which 200 were heavily loaded 3-tonners. The whole surface of the desert would obviously be ploughed up by them.

We drove on, becoming increasingly puzzled until we came in sight of the blue waters of Habbaniya lake. We even drove on down to the water's edge. Not a track was to be seen. We turned west, increasingly anxious, towards our bivouac of the night before. When only about ten miles from the previous camping ground, we suddenly came upon a number of 3-ton trucks sunk axle deep in sand. Farther on, other trucks were overtaken on the move, but they were all going west. On arrival at our old bivouac-site, we found the whole column back there once more, beginning to unpack and get their dinners. For ten hours the troops had laboured in vain in blinding heat. Every 3-ton truck had stuck in the sand.

I have always found that one of the most noxious weapons in the desert is the prismatic compass. The fatal inclination of British officers to travel the desert on a compass bearing more often than not results in disaster. For the surface of the desert is extremely varied and anyone who follows an unintelligent straight line is more than likely to fall into sand-drifts, or to find himself constantly crossing and recrossing winding wadis or ranges of precipitous hills.

In the evening a gloomy conference was held, and there was even talk of returning to Rutbah. It was said that the column had only thirty-six hours' water left, and could remain in its present site for only twenty-four hours more, after which it would have to start back for Rutbah to get water. It was difficult to see why there was not enough water, when the Euphrates in flood was only a mile or two away. Why it should be necessary to turn back on the banks of the Euphrates to draw water from a well 200 miles back in the desert was not obvious. This horror of drinking water which has not been passed by the doctor is an obsession in the British Army.

When the Arab Legion troops had seen the British column bogged down in the sand, many voices had been raised in surprise at the fact that the vehicles seemed to have deliberately made for the sandhills which could so easily have been by-passed. It did not take me long to discover that most of our troops believed that they knew a perfectly easy way round. One of the advantages of



NAWAH SALAH JULY 1917

The Arab Legion was armed with 1915 Lewis guns





We ferried across the great Euphrates

bedouins is their great knowledge of country, acquired as raiders, travellers or herdsmen. It had not previously occurred to me to enquire if any of the men knew this area, but it was very soon apparent that several of them knew it intimately. I was therefore able, at the conference, to suggest that the Arab Legion be allowed to guide the column.

Once bitten was twice shy, and the Brigadier was not going to start his column again until he had reconnoitred the route. As a result, we set off next morning with three vehicles and Arab Legion guides. The column remained stationary in its bivouac. The reconnaissance party drove to Habbaniya, led by our guides, travelling the whole way over hard gravel soil with no sand.

It was decided that the whole column should move to Habbaniya on the next day. For this purpose, the force was divided into a number of sections, to start in succession, each section being led by Arab Legion guides.

On the morning of May 16th, we set out once more. I travelled on ahead with Brigadier Kingstone. We had by now become strong friends, and he, moreover, had come to realize that the Arab Legion might have its uses.

At Al Mujarra we crossed the canal down which the surplus flood-water of the Euphrates was flowing like a mill-race. On the farther bank, a group of British soldiers in sun-helmets was manning a strong-point commanding the bridge. They were a platoon of the King's Own, which had been flown from India to join the beleaguered garrison. Habbaniya was relieved.

Meanwhile the Household Cavalry, who formed the rear-guard of the column, were still sitting about in the bivouac area, waiting to move off behind the column. An Arab Legion truck with the guides was halted at the head of the rear-guard detachment.

Suddenly, with a rapid crescendo roar of engines, four German Messerschmidt fighters came racing over the desert just above ground level and made straight for the halted column. The British troops, better trained in modern war, scattered and lay down. Some dropped into slit trenches dug the day before in the bivouac area. Sitting up in the Arab Legion truck were two Arab soldiers, Mutr Fuqaan and Muhrad Sulaiman, and between them

they held an old Lewis gun dated 1915. But this antiquated weapon was the dearest and most treasured possession of Mutr Fuqaan and Muhrad Sulaiman. They had been practising with it assiduously for six months, for just such an occasion as this, and they jumped to it now with gleaming eyes. There was no question of slit trenches for them—they were machine-gunners and this was what they had been dreaming about.

The four great black fighters saw the column of halted vehicles, banked slightly to get on to their target, and then roared down on their victims, flying only a few feet above the ground. The concentrated fire of sixteen machine-guns whipped the desert all round into a cloud of sand. The four fighters tore past overhead with a sound like ten express trains. Rattle-rattle-rattle went the poor little tin 1915 Lewis gun, but nobody heard it. In a second the fighters were over and gone, roaring away over the desert—then they banked and circled round.

Mutr Fuqaan's eyes were sparkling. This really was a battle—and all to himself—he and his mate. "No. 2! New magazine," he shouted. "Here they come again." His headgear had fallen off, his wild black hair was blowing in the wind. "I'm the brother of Aliya," he shouted as the Messerschmidts came on for a second run.

Again the deafening roar of express trains, again the desert was whipped into a cloud of sand, and in a second they were passed and away. Mutr and Muhrad followed them regretfully with their eyes to see if any of them crashed in flames, but nothing happened. Never mind, better luck next time. "No. 2! New magazine! Here they come again!"

Did the fighters ever know that that little Lewis gun had defied them, or was it just luck? On the third run, they struck right home. Bullets tore the body of the truck to splinters. The engine block was cracked. The radiator was in ribbons. The fighters roared away over the desert and disappeared. On the floor of the truck, face downwards, Mutr Fuqaan lay dying. The little Lewis gun was ripped and twisted. Muhrad Sulaiman crouched on the ground, the blood pouring from his face.

# XV

## *The Advance on Baghdad*

“Now, gentlemen, for the honour of the Household Cavalry.”

WELLINGTON at Waterloo.



## THE ADVANCE ON BAGHDAD

THE appearance of these Messerschmidts had not been entirely unexpected. There was no doubt that Rashid Ali's *coup d'état* and his declaration of war on Great Britain had been the result of an agreement with the German Government. Ever since the beginning of May and during the days when we had been skirmishing at Rutbah, reports had been received of the arrival of German aircraft in Syria. An Airborne Division had been identified in Greece, and it seemed exceedingly probable that it would be diverted to the support of Iraq. The prospect of the arrival of a German division in addition to the three or four Iraqi divisions we were expecting to meet was not very encouraging.

Meanwhile German aircraft continued to multiply. On May 15th, the very day we entered Habbaniya, British aircraft of the Palestine command had attacked German aircraft on the ground at Palmyra, Rayak and Damascus in Syria. From the middle of May onwards M.E.110 fighters and Heinkel bombers were over Habbaniya daily. It was not until just before the surrender of Baghdad that we heard that the Airborne Division in Greece had been used by the enemy in his attack on Crete.

It had been on the morning of April 30th, 1941, that the garrison of Habbaniya had woken up to find the Iraqi Army in occupation of the hills surrounding the cantonment. It is notorious that when the Germans occupy a new station, their first task is to build defences around it, whereas the British in similar circumstances lay out cricket and football fields. The R.A.F. cantonment of Habbaniya was no exception. Considerable sums of money had obviously been expended on it. It was laid out in wide avenues planted with trees and lined with lovely hedges of pink and white blossoming oleanders. The garden of the A.O.C.'s house was

delightful, the house luxurious. Playing-fields, cinema and garrison church were all there—but no defences.

The cantonment was built inside a loop of the Euphrates, which thus formed two sides of the perimeter. On the opposite side was the aerodrome, and beyond the aerodrome the chain of hills which the Iraqi Army had occupied. Thus any British aircraft which landed or took off had to do so in no-man's-land between the two armies!

The garrison of Habbaniya consisted of R.A.F. personnel, required to fly and maintain the aircraft and untrained as fighting infantry. With the exception of a few obsolete Gladiator fighters, the aircraft were training machines, for the cantonment had been used as a flying training school. There were also eighteen R.A.F. armoured cars, and 1,200 men of the Iraq Levies. Just before the blockade closed in, 350 men of the King's Own arrived by air from India, giving a total of 1,550 infantry to hold a perimeter of seven miles. The besieging forces consisted of approximately two brigades of infantry, supported by their artillery and twelve armoured cars. A third brigade was in Ramadi. The garrison held supplies for about one month. There was no possible avenue of escape, and resistance or surrender were the only courses open.

The storm did not break over Habbaniya until forty-eight hours after the completion of the investment. On the morning of May 2nd, all available aircraft took off from the aerodrome and attacked the Iraqi forces with bombs and machine-guns. The Iraqis retaliated with an artillery bombardment of the cantonment. The prospects of the garrison seemed slender indeed against such odds. The nearest reinforcements were about 600 miles away in Palestine, or 300 miles away in Basra, where a single brigade of infantry was disembarking from India. Moreover, the Iraqi troops gave proof of considerable courage and constancy under bomb and machine-gun attack.

While Rashid Ali had been the nominal leader of the *coup d'état* in Baghdad, its principal supporters were four army generals known as the "Golden Square." The fantastic odds against the garrison of Habbaniya probably saved them, for the Golden Square were over-confident. It seems probable that, if they had waited a little longer, they would have received considerably

more German support. Even without this, they could scarcely have failed to capture the cantonment if their infantry had advanced on May 2nd. But the four generals were presumably detained in Baghdad by their political activities, and the occasion passed. The Iraqi soldiers clung to their positions overlooking the aerodrome and cantonment for four days. On May 5th, the King's Own raided the Iraqi lines at night with hand-grenades.

In the night of May 5th-6th, the Iraqi Army withdrew from the hills surrounding Habbaniya, and on May 6th retired to Fellujah. Thus the immediate threat to Habbaniya was relieved, by the almost superhuman efforts of the garrison itself, before Habforce had left Palestine. But on a longer view, the situation of the cantonment was still desperate. There was an Iraqi brigade upstream of them at Ramadi, two brigades below them at Fellujah, and about another division around Baghdad. The German Air Force was arriving, and the garrison had supplies for only three weeks.

The arrival of our column was thus most welcome, for we not only brought a convoy of supplies, but also our force doubled the strength of the garrison.

While it had been agreed that the Arab Legion would assist the British column in crossing the desert, its rôle on reaching Iraq was to be independent of the British Army. Our task was to raise revolt in favour of the exiled Regent and against the illegal Rashid Ali administration. Iraq, however, is a large country, and no preliminary work whatever had been done. In any form of guerilla warfare, considerable ground work is necessary firstly in the way of securing leaders, and secondly in the formation of an entourage around each leader, the smuggling of arms, equipment and money, and the preparation of plans. No such basic work had previously been undertaken or even considered. It was therefore impossible suddenly to initiate a rising. It was necessary to start from the beginning, a process which would obviously take time. To produce an early effect, it appeared desirable to concentrate on one area alone, and for myself and the Arab Legion to go there in person. The first problem was to select the area.

Two alternatives presented themselves—first the Middle and



Lower Euphrates from Habbaniya to Basra, and secondly the Jezirah—the country between the Euphrates and Tigris, from Habbaniya to Baghdad and up to Mosul. As such guerilla operations would, of course, be subsidiary to the main military operations, it was necessary to obtain some idea of the military plan. It was also essential to obtain the blessing of the Regent, and to secure letters from him to his supporters in the area selected. Meanwhile, however, the Regent was still in Jerusalem.

I could not resist a personal predilection for the lower Euphrates, where I had lived for eight years and had innumerable friends. Military reasons, however, appeared to favour the Jezirah. To begin with, German aircraft were already operating from Mosul. The Vichy French administration in Syria was sending trainloads of munitions from Aleppo to Mosul and Baghdad, and thus to cut the railway between Mosul and the capital was an important and immediate military objective. Moreover, if Habforce were to continue its advance on Baghdad, operations in the Jezirah north of the city might have an immediate influence on the military operations. A revolt as far afield as the Lower Euphrates could have little effect on the impending operations around Baghdad. Finally the Regent and his advisers in Jerusalem were unanimously in favour of the Jezirah. After several days of consultation in Habbaniya, the Arab Legion opened its private campaign.

To commence the operations, it was decided that an attempt to cut the Mosul-Baghdad railway would have direct operational value, in preventing the arrival of reinforcements and munitions in Baghdad from Syria or even Germany. Indirectly active operations of this kind would help to raise revolt by showing that we and the Regent's forces were on the offensive. Moreover, it was feared that if Rashid Ali's administration were hard pressed in Baghdad, they might retire to Mosul, join the German forces which had already reached that town, and continue the struggle from there with their backs to German-controlled Syria. To close this avenue of escape in advance was therefore of value.

Major-General Clark had arrived in Habbaniya by air and taken command of the operations. On their withdrawal from Habbaniya, the Iraqi forces had cut the dykes of the Euphrates, and the country east and west of Fellujah on both banks of the

river was under water. The General considered the possibility of an advance on Baghdad by way of Musaiyib, and the Arab Legion reconnoitred the desert from Habbaniya to Musaiyib with this object in view. The plan was, however, subsequently abandoned.

With these various delays and the necessity of referring to the Regent in Jerusalem, it was May 23rd before the first Arab Legion raiding party was ferried over the Euphrates south of Habbaniya. The party consisted of eight Arab Legion trucks and two of our home-made armoured cars, two R.A.F. armoured cars and an R.E. officer. Meanwhile, we had sent off letters from the Regent and his advisers to various supporters on the Tigris.

We travelled slowly through most of a burning hot day, across bare desert. No tribes were encountered after we left the Euphrates except a group of little tents of Shammar. In the afternoon, we halted in a wide hollow dotted with thick bushes eight or ten feet high, beside which we parked our vehicles for concealment from the air. Those who have taken part in operations behind the enemy's lines will appreciate how remarkably conspicuous we felt, sitting with eighty men and twelve vehicles in the open desert, sixty miles from our nearest reinforcements. Aircraft passed over several times during the day, perhaps going to attack Habbaniya.

At sunset we closed in towards the Euphrates, six miles south of Samarra. The flatness of the desert was here broken by long dykes of earth, perhaps fifteen feet high, the remains of ancient canal systems. We followed in the lee of one such bank until we seemed to be about a mile from the Tigris. We then halted and lay in observation.

It was now quite dark, and the bright Arabian stars shone overhead. We lay on top of the bank, in the still silence of the desert. Below us were the black silhouettes of our trucks. In the distance was a continuous hum of engines, from the traffic plying up and down the main Mosul-Baghdad road. As it grew dark, the lights of the trucks on the road appeared like the eyes of fiery dragons, crawling up one behind another towards us and then roaring by along the main road.

We sent a patrol to the road to look at this traffic, but they reported it to be all civilian. To seize and burn a couple of trucks

was tempting, and might indeed have spread alarm and despondency, as was our rôle. But on second thoughts we decided that this was not total war—our enemy was not the people of Iraq, but a small political clique. We decided to limit ourselves to the railway.

The R.A.F. armoured-car commander and the sapper officer went forward, while I remained with the troops, lying waiting in silence beneath the stars. The trucks with the bright lights continued to roar past. At length the demolition party came back, silent figures looming up in the dark. The sapper officer had said that explosives were extremely scarce, and, moreover, they had not found a bridge worth blowing up. As a result, he had contented himself with disconnecting and removing a number of rails. This did not seem to me very satisfactory, but it was already past midnight, so we decided to move away.

What backing and filling, what racing of engines, what accidental switching on of lights and muttered imprecations ensued is best not described. The question of driving a force of vehicles over rough desert in the dark without lights obviously needed further study. We drove until we thought we were a safe distance from the road and railway, and then lay down for a short sleep.

An hour later, we woke in the pale freshness of the desert dawn. In a few minutes we were on the move again, keeping a little west of our outward route. About nine o'clock, we struck fresh vehicle tracks going east and west. Reconnoitring them westwards, we decided they were making for Ramadi, where an Iraqi brigade was stationed. Somewhat dissatisfied with our railway episode, we decided to ambush this track and await developments. Finding a sandy piece of soil between two low hills, we concealed the greater part of the force in a fold of the ground, placed look-outs in both directions and sat down to hope for sport.

Two hours later the eastern picket signalled enemy in sight. We lay with beating hearts, until we heard the sound of engines and changing gear, and two Iraqi trucks topped the rise coming towards us. The troops leaped forward with whoops of joy and after a few minutes of exhilarating pursuit, the enemy was overtaken and captured. They proved to be an Iraqi captain and six other ranks on their way to Ramadi. We celebrated the occasion

by brewing up a cup of tea, which we shared convivially with the enemy, and returned in better spirits to Habbaniya. The Regent had meanwhile arrived, and to him we presented the Iraqi prisoners.

When I had left Habbaniya with this party, I had left Lash with the remainder of the Arab Legion column. On our return, we marked his map with our topographical information, discussed what to do next and gave him our blessing. On the evening of May 25th he ferried across the Euphrates, and early on the 26th he set out to blow up the railway again, this time north of Samarra where we hoped to find a better bridge. His party consisted of nine Arab Legion trucks, one home-made armoured car and an R.E. detachment, but without any R.A.F. armoured cars. If he failed to find a good bridge north of Samarra, we decided to make next time for the Fettah gorge, half-way to Mosul, where it was said that more damage could be done.

When Lash's raid was west of Samarra, however, they ran into an Iraqi patrol of seven vehicles. The Arab Legion, which had always made up for any lack of equipment or training by its dash and enthusiasm, burst into song and drove straight for the enemy. The hostile patrol took to flight without further ceremony. In a running battle which lasted for several miles, the Iraqis lost three killed, an unknown number of wounded, and one prisoner who fell off his truck. The Iraqi patrol was eventually marked to ground into the gates of the town of Samarra. The Arab Legion suffered no casualties. Our patrol was so elated by this hunt that they returned to tell us all about it without troubling to blow up the railway!

In spite of our wish to keep up a continuous succession of guerilla raids, various other tasks detained us in Habbaniya. The first of these had been the need for consultation and reference back to the Regent in Jerusalem before beginning our operations. During these days of waiting, from May 16th to the 23rd, I was invited to visit the Iraqi Army prisoners of war in Habbaniya cantonment. I found several hundred officers and men.

The majority of the officers expressed indignation at the whole course of the operations. They had been sent out of Baghdad,

they told us, in complete ignorance of the situation. Some had even been informed that they were going on manoeuvres. The Golden Square were apparently doubtful of the loyalty of the army after they had driven the Regent and his supporters into exile. They had cajoled the army into the field by not telling them what was afoot, and relying on the fact that when the troops reached Habbaniya, they would occupy the cantonment without opposition. The unexpected vigour and courage of the defence had upset their calculations. Although the Iraqi troops stood their ground with courage when plunged into these unexpected operations, the Golden Square were nonplussed by the need to fight and seem to have lost control of the situation.

I talked to these Iraqi officers with pleasure, and many of them became my friends. I did what I could to secure better conditions and more comfort for them. Then a new idea occurred to me. The arrival of the Regent from Palestine was expected. Why should he not be guarded by his own troops?

I explained my idea to the officers, most of whom welcomed it cordially. Soon I had 200 Iraqis of all ranks as volunteers. The British Army was slightly surprised when I suggested the return of their weapons to 200 prisoners of war, but I got my way without much difficulty. When His Highness arrived from Palestine, he was met by a guard of honour of his own troops.

We subsequently pitched a camp for him close to where the Arab Legion was bivouacking in the desert, some five miles downstream from Habbaniya. Here the Regent was again guarded by the infantry of his own army.

We were by no means certain that the enemy had not located his whereabouts, for we seemed to receive rather more frequent visits from the German fighters after he camped with us. The Arab Legion, who had at last been persuaded to dig slit trenches, seemed almost to enjoy these breaks in the monotony. They would greet the great tearing fighters with steady aimed bursts of automatic fire, and as the enemy roared away into the distance grinning faces would launch imprecations and shouts of defiance behind them. The Regent seemed unmoved by the German interest in his whereabouts.

Our Jezirah enterprise had taught us that the desert between the

Euphrates and the Tigris was easily passable to wheeled transport. Meanwhile General Clark had decided on an immediate advance on Baghdad. Our raids had suggested the feasibility of leading a column across from the Euphrates to the Tigris and attacking Baghdad from the north. On my return from our first raid, General Clark asked me to reconnoitre a route across the desert to the Tigris, with a view to attacking Baghdad from the north. I accordingly recrossed the Euphrates once more by the ferry with a detachment of the Arab Legion in trucks.

I had spent two years in Ramadi in the 1920's. I was then a keen horseman and newly inspired with a passion for the Arabs. Day after day I had ridden from one tribal camp to the next. Night after night I had sat round the camp-fire, talking to the tribesmen. The Dulaim, the tribe which occupied both banks of the Euphrates around Ramadi, were my earliest Arab friends. I determined to begin my reconnaissance by revisiting them.

It was a hot, glaring morning in May 1941, when we moved off from the east bank of the Euphrates. We skirted along the edge of the rolling pebbly desert, glaring in the dazzling sun. On our right lay the irrigated fields of the Euphrates valley, laid out in small squares. In the distance the tops of the palm-trees on the river bank danced in the mirage.

We came to a group of twenty tents, pitched on the edge of the desert and the sown. Flocks of white sheep grazed around them, giving a quiet pastoral air to the scene. As the trucks drove up, a number of horses stampeded, tails in the air. Their forelegs were chained together to prevent their straying, and they were obliged to travel in leaps, both forefeet together, accompanied by a great rattle of chains.

A young man on a chestnut mare cantered past. His head was wrapped in a black silk kerchief embroidered with gold thread and hung with tassels, which danced around his head and shoulders.

"Ya ummi dari muhrati," he sang at the top of his voice.

*"O mother, mind my filly.  
When I'm bigger 'tis I who will ride her;  
On a soft bright scarlet saddle  
With my slender lance beside her!"*

We dispersed our trucks in case of air attack, posted pickets and then walked over to the camp. The men of the tribe were already sitting in the largest tent. The side curtains of the tent had been removed, and nothing remained but a long strip of brown awning on poles, which threw a parallelogram of shade on the ground.

The Dulaim were distressed about this war. It seemed to them peculiarly unlucky that, if two governments wanted to fight, they had to choose to do it on their land. Moreover, the Iraqi Army in its withdrawal from Habbaniya had cut the banks of the Euphrates and flooded the Duleim crops. The Iraqis were still in Fellujah and aircraft droned overhead.

A shopkeeper from Fellujah was of the company, and told how the British had bombed the town and civilians were killed. But it was admitted that they had first dropped warning pamphlets. After that we turned from politics to happier days, and exchanged reminiscences of twenty years ago.

We worked across the desert in wide formations, noting landmarks and examining the surface of the ground. It was late afternoon when far away to the east a square silhouette appeared on the flat horizon. It was Khan al Meshahida railway station, past which ran the main road from Mosul into Baghdad. We turned back, for fear of drawing too much attention to our activities.

Although speed was essential, especially in view of the possible arrival of German troops, ten days had elapsed since Habforce had arrived in Habbaniya. The delay had been due to the floods caused by the breaking of the Euphrates banks by the Iraqi Army. The main road from Habbaniya to Baghdad ran down the west bank of the Euphrates to Fellujah, where it crossed the river on a steel-girder bridge. From Fellujah to Baghdad was thirty miles along the main road.

The key to the advance on Baghdad was the steel-girder bridge at Fellujah, but between it and Habbaniya lay miles of flood-water. Attempts were made in vain to close the breaches in the dykes. The mighty Euphrates, having found this new outlet for his pent-up flood water, swept contemptuously aside the sand-

bags, reeds, earth or timber which ant-like men thrust forward into his swirling eddies. Meanwhile the possibility that the Iraqis would demolish the girder bridge increased daily.

The indefatigable garrison of Habbaniya set out to seize Fellujah without waiting for the repair of the dykes. Five infantry columns started during the night of May 18th-19th. Some of the troops had to wade through the floods, towing behind them little boats which in happier days had been used for rowing or sailing on Habbaniya lake. These "little ships," laden with supplies and ammunition, replaced the wheeled transport stopped by the floods. The columns were composed of men of the Iraqi Levies, the King's Own, and the 2/4 Gurkha Rifles, who had arrived by air from Basra. Fellujah town was captured on the evening of May 19th, with the vital girder bridge intact.

Before dawn on May 22nd, however, a fresh brigade of infantry from Baghdad delivered a counter-attack on Fellujah and broke into the town. Fighting continued until the evening, when the enemy finally withdrew.

Meanwhile efforts to close the breach in the dyke had been finally abandoned. It was decided that the column destined for the advance on Baghdad would be ferried across the gap. General Clark issued the orders for the advance. Brigadier Kingstone was to advance from Fellujah along the direct road to Baghdad. His column consisted of one squadron of Household Cavalry, two companies of the Essex Regiment, three armoured cars under the imperturbable Cassano, and a troop of 25-pounders.

Another column was to cross the Jezirah by the route which we had reconnoitred. This detachment was to consist of the Household Cavalry Regiment less one squadron, a troop of 25-pounders, three R.A.F. armoured cars and the Arab Legion. We ferried over the Euphrates on the evening of May 27th, and bivouacked on the edge of the desert on the other bank.

The Arab Legion set off next morning in advance of the column, in their now accepted rôle of combined advance guard and guides. The column made a long halt half-way across the desert for lunch, a loss of time for which it was to pay next day. Meanwhile I took a few of the Arab Legion and went on ahead to cut the railway and telephone lines at Meshahida railway station before



the column arrived. We had an R.E. detachment with us, but unfortunately the sappers again had not enough explosives to blow up a culvert or bridge and contented themselves with cutting a few lengths of line. A machine-gun fired on us from the railway station. While we were thus engaged, the main column arrived, crossed the railway line and turned southwards down the main Mosul-Baghdad road. By the time we had finished our jobs, we found ourselves at the rear of the column instead of in front.

From Meshahida station, the column rolled swiftly southwards down the main road towards Baghdad. The country consisted of flat alluvial soil. A few hundred yards on our right, on a low embankment, ran the railway line from Mosul to Baghdad. A mile on our left, the Tigris bank was lined with gardens of date palms. On the horizon ahead could be seen the minarets and golden domes of the Great Mosque of Kadhimain, the northern suburb of Baghdad.

The column halted as we approached Taji station. Being now at the rear of the column, we could not see what was going on in front. The sun was already low in the sky. It occurred to me that the whole column was in full view of Taji station, and that the telephone line had not been cut between the station and Baghdad. I wrote a note to the column commander's staff to that effect.

Eventually we were told that the head of the column had made contact with the enemy. Spasmodic firing could be heard in the distance. It was growing dusk, and we still sat beside our vehicles on the road, when a passenger car drove up to the rear of the Arab Legion column, where one of our armoured cars had been placed as rear-guard. The strange car suddenly stopped, endeavoured to turn round and escape, and refused to halt when challenged. The gunner in the armoured car gave it a burst and the car swerved and pulled up. It proved to contain no less a person than the Governor of the City of Baghdad, Jallal Beg Khalid. He was accompanied by a colonel in the Iraqi Army, shot through the stomach and already dying. Jallal Beg had a painful wound in his hand.

The Rashid Ali Government had, it appeared, heard of our first attempt to cut the railway on May 23rd south of Samarra. They had received a report that three Englishmen had been



The Regent of Iraq, H.R.H. Prince Abdullilah



Arab Legion, 1935



Arab Legion, 1945

*Imperial War Museum*

seen tampering with the railway line at night. This statement was perfectly accurate, as the column and myself had been lying up in the desert a mile from the road. Two days later they received a report of Lash's little battle with the patrol outside Samarra. The Mosul railway was of immense importance to the Rashid Ali Government, and it was extremely sensitive to any threat to it. Accordingly, on the morning of May 28th, the Governor of Baghdad and a colonel in the Iraqi Army were sent from the capital to Samarra, to investigate these attacks on the railway and to take measures to deal with them. While they were in Samarra, we had slipped in between them and the capital, and as they drove home in the dusk they suddenly ran into the rear of our column.

Meanwhile we ascertained that the head of our column had been engaged with the enemy three miles south of Taji station. After dark, our forward troops withdrew, and we slept in the fields. Had we arrived at Taji at noon, instead of halting for lunch, we might perhaps have driven into Baghdad the same evening, for the Iraqi staff was unprepared for an attack from the north. All their attention was concentrated on the column advancing from Fellujah. But by next morning, a considerable force of infantry was in position in front of us.

The commander of the column was Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. Ferguson, who commanded the Household Cavalry Regiment. He informed us that he proposed to attack once more next morning in the direction of Kadhimain, and asked that the Arab Legion move forward on his left, between the Household Cavalry and the Tigris. The Arab Legion, alas, was armed only with rifles and a few 1915 Vickers and Lewis guns. It had no artillery or mortars or other support weapons, and was therefore scarcely capable of a serious battle against an enemy in an entrenched position.

We set out at dawn, and drove across the flat open fields nearly to the banks of the Tigris. Then we dismounted and infiltrated through the tall date gardens until we came out on the bank of the Tigris. The great river rolled past like a vast flood, forming swift eddies below the bank at our feet. The far shore was thickly clothed with palm gardens like our own. A mile farther down,

where the river rounded a bend above Kadhimain, the outline of the palm trees was softened by the pale-blue morning mist. The morning sun sparkled on the eddying water of the river.

Families of Arabs lived in reed huts under the shadows of the date palms. They were suspicious of this invasion of bedouins. We moved along the river bank towards Kadhimain. A party of Arab girls climbed up the bank from the water's edge, and walked away in single file along a twisting path between the date palms. Their slim tall figures swayed from the hips. Each balanced an earthenware water-jar on her head.

Beneath the palms grew bushes of pomegranate bright with little scarlet blossoms. The air was full of the cooing of doves. The rays of the sun filtered through the palms and threw a lace-work of sun and shade on the ground. For a moment we forgot our month in the shadeless glare of deserts. The anxieties of war fell from us. We feasted on this magic scene. We drew in deep drafts of the cool, moist, sparkling air. Sunrise on the Tigris in May:

*"Such sights as youthful poets dream  
On summer's eve by haunted stream."*

There was an Iraqi horsed cavalry regiment on the bank of the Tigris opposite to us. It could not cross to us, nor we to it. Away to our right, on the main road, spurts of smoke and dust marked the bursting of shells. The hollow crump of the explosions came to our ears dimly on the breeze. I posted pickets on the river bank to watch the Iraqi cavalry and hastened back to the main column. The Household Cavalry had attacked at dawn and advanced three miles. Now they were held up by strong opposition in the Kadhimain brickfields. A second attack had failed.

The Governor of Baghdad was awake and talking, though in some pain from his hand. Ernest Altounyan, who had made himself our doctor, was caring for him. Jallal Beg was touchingly grateful. Our soldiers were of the old-fashioned type, who fought without hate. Modern practice of mass hatred had not reached us. None of us felt any resentment against the Iraqis. As a result, the men chatted cheerfully with the wounded Governor, as he lay on his stretcher on the little platform of Taji station. "Such a noble

army as yours deserves to win the war," he said, smiling rather ruefully.

We had not, of course, meant to shoot him, but, after all, one could not blame the machine-gunner for putting a burst into a strange car at dusk when it refused to halt.

"I think we had better send you back to Baghdad," I said. Jallal Beg looked surprised. "There is no road," he said. "We'll put you on a boat and float you down the Tigris," I replied. After all, I could not get myself to regard all this business as a genuine war. I had spent ten of my best years in Iraq, and had myself served in the Government. It was only a piece of political manœuvring for which we could not hold the Iraqi people responsible.

We transported Jallal Beg across the fields in an ambulance to the banks of the Tigris. The men working in the palm gardens produced a canoe, and, amid protestations of gratitude and affection, the Governor launched out upon the waters to return to the City of the Khalifs. It was not until the next day that I fully realized the irregularity of my action. I mentioned to the G.O.C. that we had taken the Governor of Baghdad a prisoner. "That's good," said the General. "Got him in the bag, have we?" "Well, not exactly," I answered. "We sent him back to Baghdad." The soldiers looked at me in surprise. I explained rather lamely. "C'est magnifique," commented somebody. "Mais ce n'est pas la guerre!"

The day dragged on rather wearily. The Household Cavalry were held up in the brickfields outside Kadhimain. Our single troop of 25-pounders could make little impression. All the aircraft were being used to support the column advancing from Fellujah. I discussed the situation with Colonel Ferguson, the Column Commander.

The result of breaking the banks of the Euphrates by the Iraqi Army had been to flood a great part of the country between that river and the Tigris. Our column was advancing towards Baghdad along a strip of dry land. On the east lay the River Tigris and on the west the floods around Aqqar Kuf. To skirt these floods our lines of communication had to run northwards beside the railway line as far as Meshahida station, and then turn west to cross the

desert to Habbaniya. The enemy was still holding Meshahida station, and the railway line from there to Mosul had doubtless been repaired. We could not destroy it for long for lack of explosives. The enemy was believed to have a brigade of infantry in Mosul; another enemy brigade was at Ramadi. If he moved these two brigades to Meshahida, he could bottle us in by occupying a line running east and west from the Tigris to the north-east of the Aqqar Kuf floods.

I therefore agreed with Colonel Ferguson that the Arab Legion should go back and capture Meshahida station. Using it as a base, we should then drive on and cut the railway farther north, to prevent the garrison of Mosul coming to the assistance of Baghdad.

Most of the Arab Legion were holding the pickets on the banks of the Tigris, watching the Iraqi cavalry. I sent them word of the situation. Then, collecting a troop of infantry in trucks and one of our own armoured cars, I set out northwards in the afternoon towards Meshahida station. One of the trucks drove on ahead as advanced guard and we followed.

Suddenly bullets began to whistle over fast. The R.E. sergeant who came with us to blow up the railway was grazed by a bullet on the cheek. The advanced guard had jumped out of their truck and were lining a ditch beside the road. I followed their example. The advanced guard's truck came racing back, nearly ran over us, hit the bank, zigzagged across the road, righted itself, and pulled up 200 yards beyond. I caught a glimpse of the driver's scared face. Why will drivers get so excited?

I tried to take stock of the situation. The enemy's fire seemed to be coming from a ditch lined with willows, about 200 yards away on the right of the road. Meanwhile the rest of our party were in the ditch beside me. They brought a Vickers gun into action. Our armoured car pulled off the road, drove forward about ten yards, and opened on the enemy. "Allah curse his father!" shouted a man who was lying beside me in the ditch firing his rifle. "What sort of an armoured car is this? Why does he not close on the enemy? God curse his father and his father's father!"

I ran down our ditch and found Corporal Ferhan. I told him to follow an irrigation ditch which seemed to lead from our position

to behind the enemy's right, and to shoot him up from there. He looked round to where I was pointing, nodded his head and ran off down the ditch, picking up half a dozen men as he went. We now had two Vickers guns and fifteen or sixteen rifles in action. The enemy's fire seemed to be petering out. Only now and again a single bullet came over with a "whitt." Soon Corporal Ferhan appeared near the end of the row of willows. We stood up in our ditch. Some of the enemy climbed out of their trench and advanced towards us. They had two killed and two wounded. The remainder surrendered. The Arab Legion had no casualties except the graze to the R.E. sergeant's cheek. The enemy were a party sent down from Sumaika in two vehicles to reconnoitre our column and report back urgently. They had been lying up watching, when our detachment suddenly drove up the road at them and they had no time to get away.

We were walking slowly back to our trucks, talking to the prisoners, when I looked up and saw a train under full steam coming towards us from Meshahida station. For a moment I could scarcely believe my eyes. The line passed only 300 yards from where we stood and the train was puffing unconcernedly towards us. A few miles to the south the front line was astride the railway. We feverishly snatched our weapons, the Vickers gunners frenziedly swung their gun round and pulled out a new belt of ammunition. The armoured-car turret revolved slowly. Now everyone was laying an aim on the nearest point of the railway line as it passed west of us. I sent one truck tearing down the road to warn column headquarters.

The train was puffing steadily nearer. It seemed to be pushing an open, flat truck in front of it. The platform of this truck was crammed with men standing, while others were seated along the side dangling their legs. Suddenly, when the leading truck was almost level with us, the whole train pulled up dead, the engine went into reverse and in less than a minute she was steaming away northwards at full speed.

We sent the prisoners from our skirmish back to the main body, and followed up the train with the armoured car and our remaining truck. It was standing in the station. We dismounted behind a bank and opened fire on the station, but we had too few men



left to be able to attack. The station itself consisted of a massive two-storey loopholed fort. It was believed to be garrisoned by a platoon of the Iraqi Army and eight or ten Iraqi police, not to mention the men on the train, whatever they were. Meanwhile the sun was setting. We lay watching the train and station until dark, and then posted pickets in case the train were to try again during the night.

# XVI

## *Home Again*

"Ah! When will this long weary day have end,  
And lend me leave to come unto my love?"

EDMUND SPENSER.



## HOME AGAIN

COLUMN Headquarters spent a somewhat anxious night. The Household Cavalry were still held up in the Kadhimain brickfields, and for all we knew the Mosul brigade might be detraining in Meshahida railway station. It was decided to attack and capture Meshahida station on the morning of May 30th. For this purpose a column moved out at dawn consisting of one 25-pounder gun, escorted by a squadron of Household Cavalry and the Arab Legion. The mysterious train had vanished and Meshahida station seemed to be entirely deserted. However, the 25-pounder opened up to make certain. When it had scored six direct hits on the heavy masonry walls of the fort, the Arab Legion went forward and occupied the building without opposition. The garrison had vanished. The Household Cavalry and the 25-pounder rejoined the main column at Taji.

We started at once to clean the fort and put it in a state of defence. A big truck pulled up in the road outside. It was piled high with wooden crates full of fresh eggs. We told the man he could not go on. He was cross, and said these eggs were wanted in Baghdad for breakfast. He was incredulous when we told him that there was a battle between him and the city. As we were on bully-beef and biscuits, I borrowed some crates of eggs for the troops' breakfast. Some weeks later in Amman I received the bill by post.

Lash was put in command at Meshahida fort. His orders were to cover the rear of the Kadhimain column from attack, and to protect the lines of communication which ran from Taji to Meshahida and from there to Habbaniya. For this purpose he was continuously to patrol the area Ramadi-Samarra-Meshahida-Habbaniya, keeping it clear of the enemy, and ensuring that the railway was permanently cut south of Samarra. He was also to

establish closer touch with the tribes, particularly Shammar, and with other supporters of the Regent.

These arrangements made, it was agreed that I should pay a quick visit to Habbaniya, both to consult with General Clark and also to collect some engineering stores to enable us to put Meshahida into a state of defence. "Bring back a case of whisky," was Andrew Ferguson's final injunction.

The desert which only five days before we had reconnoitred with such caution had now been ploughed up by the wheels of the column. It was nearly sunset when I was ferried once more over the calm bosom of the great Euphrates. General Clark was uneasy. The Fellujah column had arrived to within three miles of Baghdad. Our column at Kadhimain was five miles from the capital. But both columns were now at a standstill, surprise had been forfeited and the first momentum lost. The number of German aircraft was increasing, and Habbaniya was being bombed daily. Moreover, both columns depended solely on somewhat precarious ferries over the Euphrates and the Fellujah floods—ferries which could easily have been put out of action by aircraft. The garrison of Baghdad was still on paper immensely stronger than the attacking columns.

But in war, allowance must always be made for the enemy's fears and uncertainties as well as one's own. Rashid Ali's Government attached great importance to the Mosul-Baghdad railway, both as a possible line of retreat and also because they were hoping to receive more munitions from Syria. Thus our rather ineffective raids against the railway near Samarra had produced more alarm and anxiety than they merited, and had indeed exercised a major influence on the whole campaign.

Rashid Ali's anxieties reached a climax when our column attacked Baghdad from the north, thereby apparently permanently cutting communication with Mosul. British and Indian troops from India had already occupied Basra at the head of the Persian Gulf. Our column had cut his line of retreat to Turkey and Syria. The only ways of escape still open were the road and railway which left Baghdad on the east and went up to Persia. The Rashid Ali Government was in great anxiety lest we cross the Tigris also as we had crossed the Euphrates, and cut his last line

of retreat to Persia. Hence perhaps the Iraqi cavalry regiment which was watching us from the left bank of the Tigris above Kadhimain.

For the past month, the British Embassy in Baghdad had been closely guarded by Iraqi forces. The Embassy wireless had been confiscated when hostilities began, and no news of the British community confined there had been received for nearly a month. We were sitting at dinner on the evening of May 30th, 1941, in the A.O.C.'s house in Habbaniya, when an officer came in and announced dramatically that the British Embassy wireless was on the air again! A few minutes later the message came through. It was from the Ambassador, Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, asking whether the G.O.C. would arrange for an Iraqi flag of truce to be received that night. While the G.O.C. and I had been discussing how to get the columns into Baghdad, Rashid Ali and his friends were already escaping across the Persian frontier.

Just before midnight, General Clark, Air Vice-Marshal D'Albiac and I left Habbaniya to meet the flag of truce, which had been instructed to arrive at four o'clock in the morning at the front-line posts held by Brigadier Kingstone's column. We reached the Cavalry Brigade headquarters in the small hours of the morning. They were in a little house on the Iraq Government experimental farm.

We passed through the British front line in the grey dawn. From the car, I could see groups of men sitting in shell-holes in the half-light, and my mind was suddenly flooded with memories of the Ypres Salient and the Somme twenty-five years before. We pulled up at a ditch across the road, and two Iraqi officers advanced to meet us, bearing a white flag on a pole. The Ambassador was not of the party, and we waited for an hour while a car was sent to fetch him. We sat on the bank beside the road. To the north, I could see the Kadhimain brickfields where the northern column was lying. I had not realized that the two columns were so near to each other. Between them lay a sheet of grey water. A great part of the country around us was flooded, as a result of the cutting of the banks of the Euphrates by the Iraqi Army. In many places the road which we had followed from Fellujah was a strip only fifteen feet wide, with the flood-water

washing it on both sides. The air was fresh and cool. At the edge of the road, little waves lapped on the muddy shore. Wagtails flitted about and landed on the mud. Water-birds flapped overhead. In the grey dawn the steely water and the muddy flats looked more like the Norfolk broads than the City of the Khalifs. The eastern sky turned gold, then scarlet, and the sun, the true Despot of Iraq, stepped forth to survey his dominions. The cool greyiness of the dawn had vanished, the sky was blue and the air grew hot.

At length the Ambassador arrived. Sixteen years before, sitting on either side of the fire in the administrative inspector's house in Nasiriya, Cornwallis had changed my life. He suggested to me that I resign my commission in the British Army and devote my life to the Arabs. I took his advice. Here he was again—looking white and tired. General Clark, Air Vice-Marshal D'Albiac and the Ambassador sat in the General's car to discuss armistice terms. They called me in to consult, and I drafted the preamble, which we copied out on the back of a telegraph form. Sir Kinahan Cornwallis took the draft and returned to Baghdad to discuss it with a provisional administration which had been set up for the purpose. We returned to Brigade Headquarters in the Experimental Farm for breakfast. The campaign was over.

Next morning I took Nehhab and went in to the British Embassy. No fewer than 360 British subjects of both sexes had been confined in the building for a month, cut off from all communication with the outside world. They crowded round us, but more especially round Nehhab, who represented the now almost mythical Desert Patrol.

I recognized many friends in the Embassy, but was shocked to see how they seemed to have grown pale and grey-haired. It struck me that this was just one more of those sieges in distant Asia or Africa, into so many of which their wanderlust had led adventurous Englishmen for centuries past.

Next morning the Arab Legion took leave of their many friends. We skirted the blue waters of Habbaniya lake, and set out westwards across the rolling steppes. By some vagary of the

Arabian climate, a rainstorm had burst in the middle of the desert, though it was June 2nd. Expecting to suffer from heat and thirst, we were bogged in the mud west of Rutbah. At sunset the column bivouacked. I was anxious to return to Amman, and to report to His Highness the Amir the details of the campaign. Leaving the column to follow at leisure, I drove on through the still night. The darkness seemed to shut us in on both sides like walls, so that I had the impression of driving down an avenue lined with tall trees. The road was empty and deserted. It was half-past three in the morning when we entered the streets of Amman, and drove past the shuttered shops and up the hill beyond. The house was silent and dark. I followed the garden path to the bedroom window. I knocked on the window:

"My dear!" I said. "My dear!" Suddenly I heard a cry from inside. "It's me!" I said ungrammatically. "Open the back door, my dear!"

I ran round to the back door. I could see through the window the light go on in the passage. Now she was fumbling with the latchkey. "Oh, my dear! My dear! . . ."

I was home again.

Next morning I reported to His Highness. I carried a personal letter for him from General Clark, which read as follows:

"Headquarters,  
Habforce,  
Middle East Forces.

*June 1st, 1941.*

"Your Highness!

"Now that Major Glubb and your detachment of Arab Legion are withdrawing to Amman, after their short but victorious campaign in Iraq, I feel I must take this opportunity of putting on record, not only how very honoured I feel at being associated with your men in battle, but also how much I appreciate their sterling worth as soldiers.

"The successful exploits of the Arab Legion in reconnoitring the desert in advance of our mechanized columns, their harrying of the enemy's communications and the cutting of the railway, and also their safeguarding of the communications of one of my



independent columns from attack in the rear, have made me appreciate their many military attributes.

"Their initiative, determination and cheerfulness under all circumstances have made it the greatest pleasure to be associated with them on the field of battle.

"May I, with great respect, be allowed to congratulate Your Highness on the efficiency of this most distinguished force. I only hope that I may have the good fortune to be associated with them in further exploits.

"I have the honour to remain,

Your Highness' obedient servant,

(Sgd.) GEORGE CLARK,  
Major-General."

His Highness was pleased, and I received with gladness his thanks and congratulations. Relieved he well might be. If the Germans had been a little quicker, and had established themselves firmly in Iraq, or if the British had hesitated to press forward against such fantastic odds, the effect on the future of the world might have been profound. The Germans already virtually controlled Syria. If they had secured their grip on Iraq, it would only have been a question of time—and a short time at that—before they invaded Trans-Jordan and Palestine, and advanced on Egypt from the east while Rommel attacked from the west. We had no idea then that a few weeks later Germany would attack Russia, and that streams of munitions and supplies would pour along the Haifa-Baghdad road and up the Persian Gulf to Basra to our hard-pressed ally.

If Baghdad had not been so quickly captured in May 1941, the southern route for aid to Russia could not have been opened. On the contrary, the Germans might have occupied Basra and Suez, and launched their submarines into the Indian Ocean, where they would have met the Japanese six months later. All this, perhaps, is guess-work, but there can be no doubt that the results would have been far-reaching if the Germans had consolidated their position in Iraq in May 1941.

Judged by the vast armies which were later on to become locked in battle in Europe, the little column which crossed the Syrian

desert was utterly negligible. Where European warfare dealt in armies, we handled companies. Yet destiny prescribed that this little handful should play a more important rôle in the war than divisions or army corps might do elsewhere.

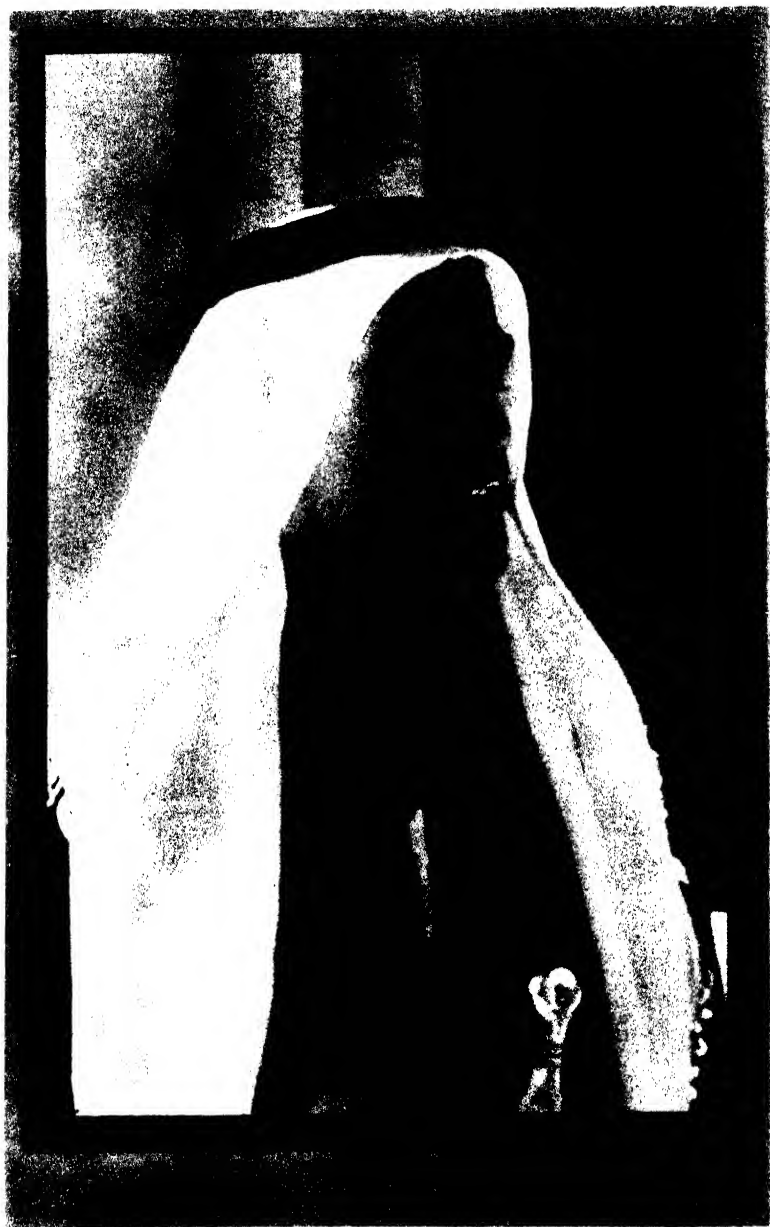
The Arab Legion did no heavy fighting. Their casualties and wounded were less than a dozen. But the Commander-in-Chief subsequently stated his opinion that if they had not been there, Baghdad would not have been taken.

It was not their fighting record on this campaign that constituted their claim to the gratitude of Britain. But May 1941 was for her the lowest trough of misfortune. During this month we lost Crete. The enemy in the Eastern Desert was advancing on Egypt. He was already in Syria. There was still no suggestion that Russia or America would enter the war. Britain stood facing the world—alone. When not one other Power, great or small, ventured to commit herself to Britain's support, Trans-Jordan stepped into the ring. She was not compelled to do so—she was a mandated country, and her independence had been recognized by Britain herself. The British Army did not expect the Arab Legion to fight. Brigadier Kingstone viewed them at first with no small suspicion. But we had worked with and loved these men. We had shown them a better way of service than their old mutually destructive raiding. When we showed them the path of honour, their Arab spirit was quick to respond. Having profited from us when times were easy, they were too honourable to desert us when they saw us alone and at bay!

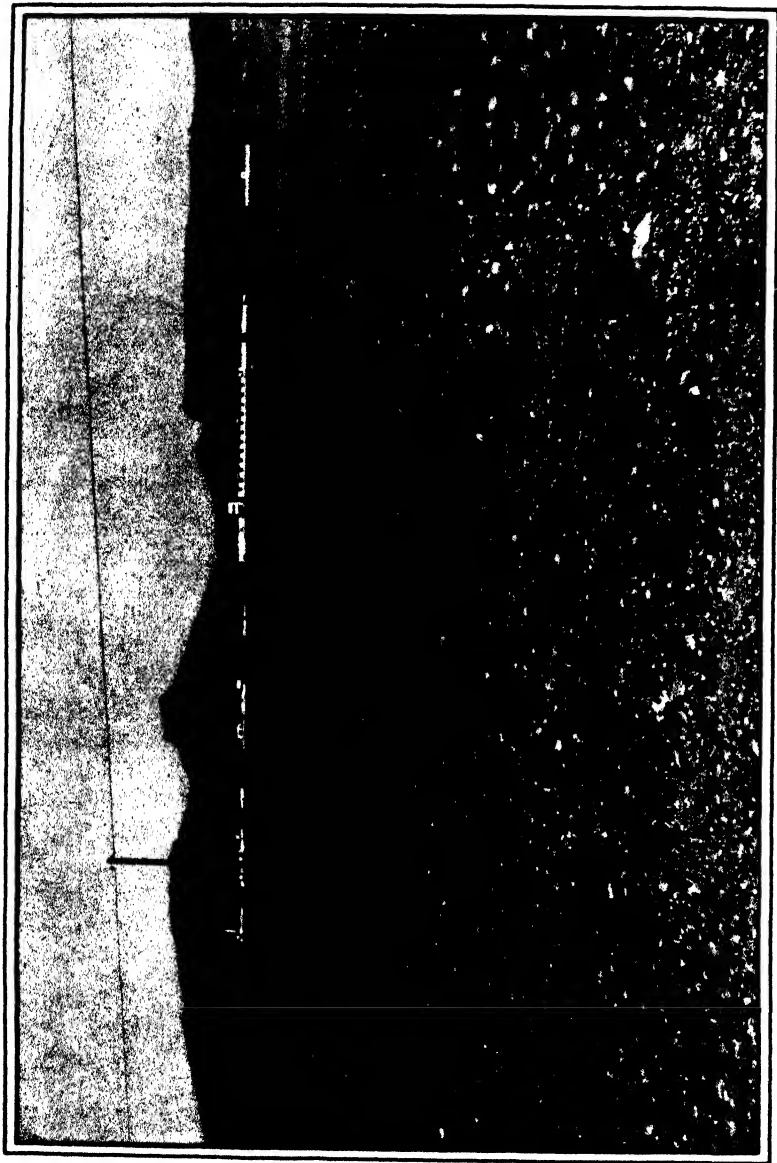
His Highness sent his second son, the Amir Naif, to meet the returning column. We stood in the square outside the railway station as the vehicles drove by. The trucks looked worn and battered, and white with desert dust. But no dirt or weariness could quench the enthusiasm, the proud bearing or the air of quick alertness which I knew and loved so well.

As I stood beside the Prince to take the salute, the tears ran slowly down my face.





His Highness was pleased



The ugly new village of Palmyra. On the right, the masonry

# XVII

## *The Queen of the East*

"Amid the barren deserts of Arabia a few cultivated spots rise like islands out of the sandy ocean. Even the name of Tadmor or Palmyra denoted the multitude of palm trees which afforded shade and verdure. . . . A place possessed of such advantages . . . was soon frequented by the caravans which conveyed to the nations of Europe a considerable part of the rich commodities of India. . . .

"In his march over the desert, the Emperor Aurelian was perpetually harassed by the Arabs; nor could he always defend his army . . . from these flying troops of active and daring robbers. . . . The siege of Palmyra was an object far more difficult and important, and the emperor, who pressed the attacks in person, was himself wounded with a dart."

EDWARD GIBBON: *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.



## XVII

### THE QUEEN OF THE EAST

FOR eleven years I had worked in Trans-Jordan and dealt with many problems and disputes along the Syrian frontier. Throughout this time Trans-Jordan, the Arab Legion, Peake Pasha and myself had been constantly accused by the French of intriguing against them. Nothing we could do affected their firm conviction of our treachery. No modification in this situation resulted from the fall of France and the arrival of the Germans and Italians as friends of the Vichy French administration. We still abstained scrupulously from interference in Syria. The French still believed that we were busy intriguing.

Then suddenly, in February 1941, we received secret instructions from England reversing the situation. We were told to place ourselves in touch with the people of Syria, with a view to possible resistance to the Germano-Italo-Vichy Government. Money was placed at our disposal for this purpose. It was agreed that Kirkbride should deal with the Druzes and I with the Syrian tribes.

The Druzes are a religious sect, who came into existence in the eleventh century during the reign of the Fatimite Khalif al Hakim in Cairo. Thus by origin they were presumably ordinary Syrians or rather, perhaps, Lebanese. But their religious separation from the remainder of the inhabitants caused them to marry each other only, a process which in a thousand years caused them in some ways to grow into a separate race, or at least a distinct community.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Druzes were a powerful community in the southern Lebanon, ruled over by a famous local prince, Besheer Ash Shehabi. In 1851 the great Besheer died, and the southern Lebanon fell into confusion, with increasing rivalry and fighting between the Druzes and the Christians. Napoleon III, Emperor of the French, was still seeking military adventures with which to build up a new Napoleonic tradition of glory. He intervened as protector of the



Christians, and a French army landed in the Lebanon in 1850. Under this pressure, the Turkish Government gave way, granted autonomy to the Lebanon and appointed a Christian governor. The great Besheer had skilfully held the scales between Muslims, Christians and Druzes. The appointment of a Christian governor disturbed the balance of power, and seemed to the Druzes to accord the supremacy to the Christians, and to relegate the Druze community to a subordinate position. To this day the palace of Besheer at Beit al Din bears witness to the now vanished greatness of the Shehabi dynasty. Like a little Versailles with its courtyards and fountains, it clings to a spur of those lovely mountains. Beneath the terrace the ground falls almost vertically to a gorge far below, while through a gap in the forest-clad spurs of the hills a deep blue strip of the Mediterranean sparkles in the noonday sun.

The more spirited of the Druzes were unwilling to remain in the Lebanon to witness the supersession of the dynasty by a Christian governor appointed by Constantinople. A large-scale migration took place in the 1860's to a mountainous area south-east of Damascus, since known as the Jebel Druze or the mountain of the Druzes. The range consisted principally of extinct volcanoes, and the whole area was thickly strewn with boulders of lava. In this mountain recess the Druzes thought to evade the further attentions of Governments in general and the French in particular. In 1920, however, at the end of the First World War, France reappeared in the Lebanon as the mandatory, and shortly afterwards invaded and conquered Syria. She had overtaken the Druzes in spite of their migration. In 1925 the Druzes rebelled against the French, but after prolonged military operations they were eventually defeated.

As we considered the possible invasion of Syria from Trans-Jordan in 1941, the Druze mountains were obviously of great importance. The poor communications in the volcanic area rendered it a difficult piece of country to invade. But if the British forces were to make straight for Damascus, the Druze mountains would be behind their right flank and rear. If the Druzes were hostile, they would be in a position to attack the communications of the force advancing on Damascus. Kirkbride

undertook to establish relations with the Druze leaders in order to prevent such an eventuality.

Some weeks before, when the Germans seemed to be about to take over Syria entirely, I wrote a memorandum on the subject of the invasion of that country. I suggested that while the regular forces advanced directly upon Beirut and Damascus, another force should move up the desert east of the Druze mountains and turn in to the west above Damascus. This plan was finally adopted, although not perhaps on my recommendation. The General Staff had already had the same idea. While, therefore, Kirkbride established relations with the Druzes, I opened communications with the tribes on the east of the line Hama-Homs-Damascus.

We were engrossed in the menace of a German occupation of Syria when, in April 1941, the Iraq crisis unexpectedly confronted us. For the moment Syria was forgotten. Iraq monopolized our attention. When we returned to Amman after the fall of Baghdad, we found that the Syrian situation had become more acute. All the German aircraft which took part in the Iraq campaign had landed and refuelled on Vichy aerodromes in Syria. Some of them had been attacked on the ground by the R.A.F. in the process. The French in Syria had forwarded trainloads of munitions of war to the Rashid Ali Government in Baghdad. It seemed obvious that some action would soon have to be taken about Syria. The enemy had meanwhile completed the occupation of Crete, from which island he could easily transfer German troops to Syria by air.

To our consternation, however, the British invasion of Syria commenced without any request for the co-operation of the Arab Legion. The desert flanking movement seemed to have been abandoned. British troops advanced up the Mediterranean coast towards Beirut, while an Indian Brigade group moved up the main road from Deraa towards Damascus. The only part played by the Arab Legion in the first few days was a passive one. A force of Druze cavalry commanded by French officers crossed the Trans-Jordan frontier from the Jebel Druze and attacked the isolated little Desert Patrol fort at Umm al Quttein. It was the smallest of our desert forts, and indeed scarcely aspired to be

called a fort at all. We had built it ourselves without money. The bigger forts had all been built by contract through the Public Works Department. As a result, the walls of Umm al Quttein were inclined to be a little irregular, and the corners of the block-houses were not at right angles. But inside it was the Desert Patrol, and that made up for any architectural shortcomings.

The enemy surrounded the fort one afternoon, and opened fire. The attack was continued intermittently all night. Next morning the garrison, which consisted of only twelve men, was still resisting gallantly, though obliged to husband their ammunition. But their wireless messages breathed a cheerful defiance, though the besiegers outnumbered them by twelve to one. Their courage seemed to depress the enemy, who faded away later in the morning without attempting a close assault.

Meanwhile some Syrian tribes had decided that a Government war provided an excellent occasion for the renewal of tribal raiding. A raiding party crossed into Trans-Jordan, and rounded up two flocks of camels from the unsuspecting bedouins. Ten years of law and order had relaxed the vigilance of the nomads. A sergeant and four men of the Arab Legion gave chase on camelback, and penetrated fifty miles into Syria, although both the Government and the tribes were at war with us. Such swift daring was unexpected. The raiders themselves were overtaken unawares. The plundered camels were recovered in a short swift attack, and safely escorted back to Trans-Jordan through country swarming with excited tribesmen. The swift daring of this counter-blow put a complete stop to tribal outbreaks on the border, although Syria and Trans-Jordan were themselves at war. The sergeant was awarded the Military Medal. Although the enemy had been the attackers in both these incidents, the Arab Legion had won all the honours.

At last the long-awaited orders arrived. Habforce, our comrades of the Iraq campaign, were to carry out the "right hook" movement after all. Since the Iraq armistice, most of them had been in Habbaniya, though some of the Household Cavalry had gone on up the Euphrates to the Syrian frontier at Al Qaim.

For the new campaign we had 350 all ranks available, divided into headquarters and nine troops. We also had a troop of three

home-made armoured cars. In the Iraq campaign, agitators had endeavoured to convince the troops that they were to be employed to fight their fellow Arabs in the interests of Great Britain. No such political motives could be attributed to the invasion of Syria. The Arabs for twenty-five years past had resented the presence of the French in Syria, but the alliance between France and Britain had made it impossible to oust them. Now by a fortunate coincidence, as it appeared to the Arabs, the British and French were on opposite sides. The hour for the redemption of Syria had struck.

The Arab Legion column assembled at Mafraq, and His Highness the Amir came himself to give them a farewell address. It was a bright June morning, with a strong westerly breeze, when we drew the men up in a hollow square and His Highness stepped forward to speak. His robes and cloak blew about him in the stiff breeze. He leaned on a walking-stick, which I have never seen him do before or since. But his words were on fire with his own enthusiasm, when he told the troops that the moment for the freeing of Syria had come and that he relied on them to seize this golden hour in the history of the Arabs! After three cheers for the Amir, we climbed into our vehicles and set off to the east down the Haifa-Baghdad road.

It was afternoon when we emerged from the hundred miles' journey through the black lava hills strewn with great boulders on either side of the road. It was curious now to recollect that ten years ago these lava fields had been unknown country administered by no Government. The wild nomadic tribes of mountain people had wandered here unmolested. It seemed like a dream that the Desert Patrol had first invaded this country with only forty men, moving laboriously forward a kilometre a day, clearing a track through the lava rocks with crowbars, while look-out men on the surrounding hills watched constantly for tribal raiders. Now, ten years later, this unknown wilderness was traversed by an arterial road along which whole divisions of British and Indian troops were to roll by. Many of the wild people of the mountains were following me along the road in the uniform of the Arab Legion.

We emerged from the boulder-strewn lava fields into the flat, gravelly desert. As we came in sight of the Iraq Petroleum

Company's compound at H4, aircraft appeared overhead. We were still a mile away and halted beside the road to watch. Suddenly up shot a row of fountains of dust and smoke. Then the sound came to us muffled by a contrary breeze—krump-krump-krump-krump. We waited till the attack was over and then drove in. We bivouacked in the desert beyond the Company's compound. Next morning we were off again early, and before noon we arrived at the next pumping station, H3. Here the greater part of Habforce was reassembled. In a small detached house—once the married quarters of one of the engineers—I found Brigadier Kingstone. Red in the face and hearty, he roared: "Hullo, Pasha! Back again! I thought we'd got rid of you!" But this time he did not mean it. Here also was Cassano, pipe in mouth, a coloured handkerchief knotted round his neck like a stage gipsy, but imperturbable as ever. Three days' delay ensued while we waited for an anti-tank battery to join the column, for the French really had armour.

A curious sidelight on the mysteries of Whitehall had been provided on the Iraq campaign. The Household Cavalry regiment which led the advance on Baghdad was armed only with Hotchkiss machine-guns, dating from the First World War. The Iraqi Army which was fighting against us had been equipped by the British Government with the new Bren guns! Before embarking on the Syrian expedition the Household Cavalry had received Bren guns and had bequeathed their Hotchkiss guns to the Arab Legion. We received them the day before we left Mafraq for H3. Nobody knew how to fire them. The Hotchkiss had been an inferior gun even in the first flush of its youth some thirty years before. In 1941 it left much to be desired. However, our three days' wait at H3 enabled us to find out more or less how they worked—chiefly by trial and error.

When Habforce had crossed the desert from Palestine to Iraq, two-thirds of the strength of the force had been used up guarding the 500-miles-long line of communication, against the threat of raids from Syria. In the new operations this was unnecessary. As a result, the total force was available to attack the enemy. It consisted of the 4th Cavalry Brigade, composed of the Household Cavalry Regiment (the Life Guards and the Blues), the

Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry and the Warwickshire Yeomanry. The 1st Essex Regiment, which had formed the Fellujah column in the attack on Baghdad, was with us again. No. 2 Armoured Car Company, R.A.F., still followed the imperturbable Cassano. We also had a battery of 25-pounders, an Australian battery of anti-tank guns and a battery of light anti-aircraft artillery. Last but by no means least was the Arab Legion Mechanized Regiment.

The distance from H<sub>3</sub> to Palmyra was 150 miles. The plan was that we should cross the frontier early on June 21st, 1941. It was estimated that Palmyra would be reached the same afternoon, and that the oasis would be captured that evening. The force was then to move on and cut the enemy's principal line of communication near Homs. The main French forces were still holding Damascus, their communications running through Homs and Hama to Aleppo. The advance was organized on the system which had now become generally recognized in Habforce. A number of British columns set out at different times, each one led by a detachment of the Arab Legion, acting as guides and advanced guard combined.

The oasis of Palmyra lies in an open plain. On the west and north of the oasis, a semicircle of rocky barren hills rises steeply from the plain and overlooks the surrounding country. On the south and east the flat desert stretches away, white and glaring in the summer sun. The oasis itself consists of the ruined city of Zenobia, with its tumbled-down castle and the remains of its triumphal arches and long colonnades. South and west of the ruins are date-palm gardens watered from a clear spring. The sparkling water bubbling along the little irrigation channels gives an impression of coolness and refreshment in contrast to the glaring whiteness of the desert in summer.

Palmyra had seen many sieges. Like Petra, it has been described as a defunct Port Said. Arabia has always been the commercial half-way house between India and Europe. In the classical age, the Indian trade sometimes disembarked at Aden, was carried by caravan to Petra and distributed thence to Egypt, Palestine or Damascus. The alternative route lay up the Persian Gulf by sea, and then by caravan up the Euphrates to Palmyra, whence distribution was effected to Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor.

So powerful and wealthy did the city become that in the third century A.D. she aspired to the proud title of Mistress of the Roman East. In the reign of Valerian, A.D. 258, the Arab prince of the city received the rank of a Roman consul. But so many triumphs caused the rulers of the city to overtax their resources. In A.D. 270 the Palmyrene army conquered Egypt. In A.D. 271 Zenobia, widow of the Arab Odenathus, Prince of Palmyra, assumed the title first of Queen and then of Augusta. If Rome had acquiesced in such a claim, Egypt, Syria and Arabia would have broken away from the Empire, and the Arabs would have become a Great Power, rival to Imperial Rome herself. Such a consummation was to be delayed for nearly four hundred years, until the rise of Islam.

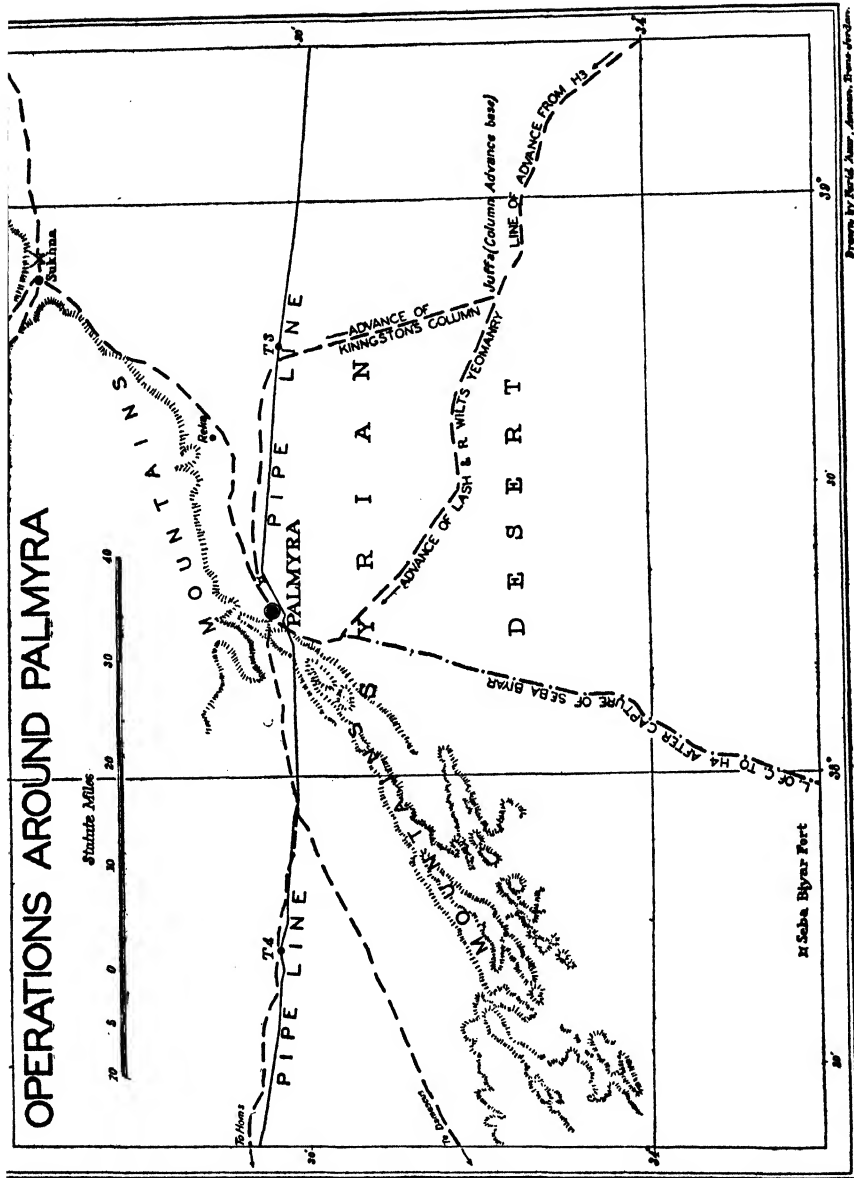
In 272, the Roman Emperor Aurelian eventually besieged and captured Palmyra. Zenobia, an Arab queen as her name of Zainab indicates, was captured by the Romans. The Queen of the East was led in chains through the streets of Rome to grace the triumph of the Emperor Aurelian.

In Turkish times the modern population of Palmyra was still living in the ruins of Roman palaces. The French, however, had cleared the archæological remains, and built an ugly new village with straight, shadeless streets and cheap houses. The new village lay east of the ruins, and farther east again on the flat plain lay two solid masonry forts occupied respectively by the Foreign Legion and the Camel Corps. These two forces constituted the garrison.

Habforce was divided up by its Commander, Major-General Clark, into three columns. The Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry led the way. Their task was to pass south of the town and to capture the hills to the west of the oasis. The remainder of the 4th Cavalry Brigade were to come up east of the town and capture the hills to the north. These columns were under the command of Brigadier Kingstone. Meanwhile, Habforce Advanced Headquarters left H3 at 8 a.m. on June 21st. It consisted of General Clark's headquarters, the 1st Battalion the Essex Regiment, artillery, sappers and five troops of the Arab Legion. I led this column with the Arab Legion. As the 4th Cavalry Brigade were ahead of us, we had little to do but bowl along over the flat desert, shimmering in the hot mirage of an Arab June.

# OPERATIONS AROUND PALMYRA

Statute Miles



at Saba River Port

Source: By World War, American Press Association



Meanwhile, the Arab Legion leading the Royal Wiltshire column had discovered an enemy picket at Juffa, twenty-five miles south-east of Palmyra. The picket consisted of a single tent occupied by a French N.C.O. and a few men of the Camel Corps. The Arab Legion trucks raced at the enemy with shouts of defiance. The men leaped down, seized the astonished Frenchman, breaking his glasses, threw the soldiers to the ground and smashed the wireless, lest by a subterfuge it give notice of our approach. But, unknown to them, the message had already been sent and Palmyra warned. Soon afterwards a French aircraft appeared overhead and dropped bombs, severely wounding a man of the Arab Legion. Meanwhile the Royal Wiltshire column turned west to by-pass the oasis from the south. The remainder of the 4th Cavalry Brigade turned to the right, with a view to moving across the open plain towards the northern hills. Here, however, it was discovered that the French were holding the Iraq Petroleum Company's cantonment at T3. The company's compound lay in flat desert. Concrete pill-boxes had been constructed in it. The position was a difficult one to capture without losses. It was surrounded by wire, and enjoyed a field of fire as flat as a billiard-table. The 25-pounder shells bounced off the concrete pill-boxes like tennis-balls. The post could have been taken in a few hours by tanks or if we had had heavier guns.

The right column, instead of seizing the hills north of Palmyra, halted in the plain and prepared to attack the outpost at T3. They were beginning to shell the concrete pill-boxes, when several formations of enemy aircraft came over. So large a number of men and vehicles in a flat plain with not an inch of cover formed an ideal target for aircraft. The column had no anti-aircraft guns, and not a single British aircraft was available to give air cover. Enemy air attacks continued until dusk, and the British column passed an unpleasant and costly afternoon.

Meanwhile, the Habforce Headquarters column was bumping along in a cloud of dust unaware of the vicissitudes which were overtaking the leading columns. The sun was already low when we reached Juffa, which had been selected as our bivouac. While the vehicles dispersed and the men started to make tea and dig slit trenches, I went forward with three vehicles and made

contact with Brigadier Kingstone's force uncomfortably scattered on the open plain, enduring repeated air attacks. A man of the Arab Legion was standing with some British troops to whom he had apparently been acting as guide. His arm was tied up in a bloodstained bandage. He had received a flesh wound from a bomb splinter. I asked him if he would not like to be sent back to hospital. His eyes sparkled. "We are your children. You brought us up," he said. "We shall not fail you on a great day like this." He refused medical treatment, saluted and walked away singing.

Next morning the situation was unchanged. General Clark asked for an Arab Legion escort while he drove up to talk to Brigadier Kingstone. I went with him, and we took an Arab Legion armoured car and two trucks. The whole of Kingstone's column was scattered about the flat desert, looking at the wired-in compound of T3. Nothing much seemed to be happening. General Clark asked for Brigadier Kingstone, and somebody went to call him. An officer came up and asked us to disperse our vehicles because "they" would soon be coming back.

A few minutes later, a distant hum of engines announced "their" return. Six bombers appeared in formation, coming from the west. Kingstone's column had dug slit trenches beside their vehicles. They descended sedately into them. I found myself standing alone with two men of the Arab Legion, seemingly surrounded by hundreds of square miles of open desert. The enemy were banking on the turn away to the north, preparatory to their first run over the target. I walked over to the left to where there appeared to be a slight fold in the ground. A surly face looked up out of a slit trench. "Ye can't come 'ere!" it said. "No room in this b—— trench." I was annoyed. "I wouldn't come near your b—— trench if you asked me," I replied.

I sat down in the mouth of a rat-hole which seemed to be the only break in the flat surface of the desert. The two Arab Legion men lay down. I lay on my back and watched the first three aircraft coming straight at us. When they seemed to be about two hundred yards short of us, I saw the bombs leave the aircraft. They looked as if they must fall straight on me. I wriggled myself as much as possible into the mouth of my rat-hole, but without much success. Suddenly there was a deafening crash behind me.

Krump-krump-krump-krump went the bursts in quick succession. I looked round. A thick pall of smoke was drifting over the dispersal area. A man appeared through the smoke, running. There was shouting. A captain somebody was hit. Some men had been buried in their slit trench. The smoke cleared away. The next flight of enemy aircraft were coming in to attack. I lay on my back and watched. After twenty minutes the aircraft flew away, and we stood up and looked around. The enemy had disappeared—till next time. I could now see Brigadier Kingstone's head emerging from a slit trench, shouting at somebody. I went over to say good morning. "I don't care for your country residence," I said fatuously.

General Clark had finished his conference and wanted to go back to his headquarters. We drove off in open formation across the open plain. Soon we met the 1st Essex, who had apparently been ordered up. They were drawn up in a kind of wide hollow square in the flat desert. The men were sitting on the ground. We stopped a little beyond them, and got out to eat our lunch. Just as we were doing so, an enemy fighter appeared, flying low. It roared down a few feet over our heads, and we could see the surface of the desert whipped up into a cloud of sand under a rain of bullets where the Essex Regiment were sitting. "How extremely unpleasant," remarked General Clark, taking out his sandwiches.

According to the original plan, the Arab Legion detachments were to lead the British columns across the desert to Palmyra, but were then to disengage before they became heavily involved with the enemy. While the British were attacking Palmyra and from there advancing on Homs, the Arab Legion were to carry out wide sweeps to the north, east and south-west, covering the rear of the British columns which were moving west towards Homs. This rôle was of some importance, because the lines of communication of Habforce lay down the centre of the desert to H3. At the same time, the enemy was still in occupation of the Upper Euphrates from Albu Kemal northwards. After the termination of the Iraq campaign, Fauzi al Qawukchi had also retired up the Euphrates with his men. This Fauzi-French combination threatened the communications of Habforce from the

Euphrates. Unfortunately, however, the Arab Legion detachments which had led the British columns became engaged with the enemy. Lash's party had led the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry to the south-west corner of the oasis on the edge of the date gardens. The column had been unable to capture the hills west of the town which were held by the enemy.

Lash had gone forward on the second day of the operations to see what was going on. He had with him a troop of Arab Legion commanded by Sergeant Salim as Som'ari, and some of Cassano's armoured cars were in support. The Arabs were impatient at what they considered the dilatory methods of the British. Reaching the edge of the palm gardens, it occurred to Salim as Som'ari that he might take Palmyra himself. The Arabs ran forward like cats, calling their war-cries. The R.A.F. armoured cars closed up gallantly in support and a battle was soon in progress. The Yeomanry were horrified at such behaviour, and begged Lash to call off his warriors. The latter retired unwillingly. They firmly believed they would have captured Palmyra if left to themselves!

The Arab Legion might have played a useful part in the attack if they had been used to infiltrate into the gardens and ruins at night. The population of the modern village would almost certainly have helped them, and they might have made life inside the oasis awkward for the French. All this, however, did not then occur to us. We had a rôle allotted to us, and we were not playing it. My mind was, therefore, chiefly concerned as to how to extract my troops from Palmyra.

Meanwhile, Brigadier Kingstone's column had moved on to attack Palmyra, leaving a troop of the Warwick Yeomanry to watch T3. Possibly the garrison reported this situation by wireless. Early in the morning of June 24th a convoy of strange vehicles drove up to the Warwicks' troop. The latter subsequently claimed that the leading vehicle was flying a white flag. Anyhow, the Warwicks went out to meet them, but were suddenly fired upon at short range, losing eight killed and two wounded. The strange vehicles drove over to the compound at T3 without pressing home the attack any further. A few minutes later a force sallied out of T3 under a French officer, and captured the remainder of the troop—one officer and nine other ranks. What the first vehicles

which attacked the Warwicks had been was never ascertained. They did not come out from T<sub>3</sub>, although they reported back there. Later events seemed to indicate that they might have been a French Desert Company from Deir az Zor on the Euphrates.

On that same morning an R.A.S.C. ration convoy had left H<sub>3</sub> for Habforce outside Palmyra. An Arab Legion truck was leading the convoy. It contained Lieutenant Scott, a British officer who had recently joined us, and three other ranks of the Arab Legion. By a most unfortunate coincidence, this convoy came in sight just as the French force was rounding up the remains of the Warwick troop. The R.A.S.C. major commanding the convoy assumed that the party were British. He went forward on foot with Lieutenant Scott and the three Arab Legion men to ask the way. All European soldiers look much the same in the desert. It was not till they were surrounded by the French that the five realized their mistake. They were captured without firing a shot, and accompanied the remnant of the Warwicks into captivity. The remainder of the R.A.S.C. convoy fortunately took the alarm.

A pleasant incident resulted from this unfortunate affair—the only real mistake the Arab Legion made on these operations. The captives were taken to a prisoner-of-war camp in Northern Syria. The three men of the Arab Legion went into the cage with a large number of British troops. But two evenings later a French N.C.O. entered the camp and took the three Arab Legion men away. Asked what he was doing, he said that “natives” were to be confined in a different camp.

When the whistle blew next morning for reveille, not a British soldier moved. They refused to turn out or go on parade. The French camp commandant arrived in a fluster to know what had happened. The British soldiers told him. They were not going on parade until their three pals came back. The commandant replied that the orders were that natives were to be segregated from European prisoners. The British replied with various oaths that they would not parade until their Arab comrades came back. And back they came in triumph!

On June 23rd, I visited Lash's detachment, which was still with the Royal Wiltshires on the south-western fringe of the oasis. To



We took an Arab Legion armoured car



Sa'ad Kuleiban had fought under Feisal and Lawrence (*from the painting by W. A. Stewart*)

reach them from Juffa, it was necessary to cross several miles of smooth desert absolutely devoid of cover and frequently visited by enemy aircraft. We travelled in three vehicles widely dispersed. Half-way across the flats, we found a stationary vehicle in which a British officer lay dying, supported by his orderly. The car had been shot up a short time before our arrival by enemy fighter aircraft.

The situation of Lash's detachment was peculiar. His force was living at the foot of a low line of cliffs facing east. A number of narrow ledges ran along the face of the cliff, and along these his men were dispersed, at a height of twenty to fifty feet above the level of the plain beneath. Enemy fighters for three nights running had visited them an hour before sunset, and had spent half an hour shooting up everything in the area. The cliff, however, faced east, so that the setting sun was just above it, and the cliff face itself was in deep shadow. Although the whole detachment was completely exposed, the enemy had never seen them.

I determined to stay with Lash until dark, so as to avoid the long drive over the open desert exposed to enemy air attack. An hour before sunset, the enemy fighters suddenly appeared overhead with a roar, precisely on time. I was lying on a rocky ledge two feet wide and thirty feet above the plain below. Before me lay the vast flat extent of the desert stretching away to the horizon, where the hills of Juffa could be seen bathed in the evening sunlight. On my left was the dark green of the oasis palm gardens. The plain below us was dotted here and there with derelict vehicles.

We were in the dress circle for this uncanny performance. The fighters came roaring along scarcely 200 feet above the ground, seeking whom they might destroy. They dipped slightly and roared down, firing all their guns and cannon at a broken Arab Legion truck scarcely 200 yards away. They then climbed and banked away from us, stooping again to fire another burst at a distant derelict vehicle which suddenly burst into flames. Then they banked again and came roaring back straight at us. Every second I expected their guns to open up and the rocks all around us to be shivered into splinters by the stream of bullets. When they seemed to be about to fly into the face of the cliff to which



we were clinging, they pulled up and passed over our heads with a deafening noise. Looking about me, I could see the whole face of the cliff alive with men like an ant-heap. It was difficult to believe that the enemy could not see us because the sun setting behind our cliff was in his eyes while we were in shadow. For twenty minutes the fighters turned, banked, roared overhead and dived and machine-gunned within a few yards of us. At last the leader began to climb and turned away to the north-west. The other aircraft formed up behind him. The roar of their engines faded away. The evening performance was over. "Ma'as Salama (Farewell in God's keeping)," remarked Lash's orderly facetiously. But personally I felt more sympathy with a soldier on the ledge above me, whom I heard growling: "May God consign them to hell fire!"

The spirits of Habforce were dampened by their lack of success in capturing Palmyra by a *coup de main*, as had been intended. The unceasing enemy air attacks and the complete absence of British aircraft from the sky was even more depressing. In Britain, in Africa, in Greece, in Crete—everywhere the British Army and Air Force were struggling against five or ten times their numbers of enemy. Was this invasion of Syria to be another fiasco, like the recent expedition to Greece? Could we carry on indefinitely with no aircraft, while enemy machines seemed to fill the sky?

While the operations thus hung fire, the Arab Legion won the first success of the campaign. Bedouins are always restless. Patrolling the desert south of Palmyra, Lash's detachment atoned for their disappointment over Salim as Som'ari's abortive assault. They encountered a French force of two officers and thirty other ranks, and fought a little battle on their own. All the enemy were taken prisoners. This success encouraged British and Arabs alike.

Meanwhile I ordered Lash to extricate his force at night and to join us at Juffa for operations farther east.

An advanced dump had been established at Juffa, where I also kept my headquarters. For the first three days the enemy's aircraft concentrated on the troops attacking Palmyra. Then they discovered Juffa—which with its dumps, vehicles and ambulances formed a more tempting target than the front-line slit trenches.

On the evening of June 25th, the enemy staged a full-dress bomber and fighter attack. The base was situated in a saucer-like depression, perhaps a mile in diameter, surrounded on all sides by steep hills. The valley and hills alike were completely bare, grey and dusty. The whole depression was dotted with vehicles, trucks and stacks of stores, petrol and equipment, dispersed over the ground in small neat stacks.

It was perhaps an hour before sunset when the first formation of bombers came over. We dropped into our slit trenches, standing up until we saw the bombs leave the aircraft and then sitting down in the trench to wait for the crash. We were on the perimeter of the bivouac looking towards Palmyra, and most of the bombs fell beyond us in the centre of the dispersal area. During a lull, however, one Arab Legion soldier thought fit to join a friend in another slit trench. He climbed out and ran across the open, just as a bomb burst a hundred yards away. He fell in a heap with a broken leg.

In between the bombing attacks came showers of incendiaries, which covered the ground with groups of glittering balls like the tinsel on a Christmas tree.

In the centre of the dispersal area was the troop of light anti-aircraft artillery—Bofors guns. Bang-bang-bang-bang-bang went the Bofors as each flight of bombers came over—up soared the red tracer shells into the air, bursting round the aircraft. One bomber seemed to be on fire, another only just cleared the ring of hills round the camp and crashed in the desert beyond. From the shelter of our slit trenches we could see the crews of the Bofors, working frenziedly regardless of the bursts around them. Now and then the smoke of a bursting bomb drifting across obscured them temporarily from view. Then it cleared away, showing them still working.

Between the bomber attacks came the fighters. The circle of hills surrounding the camp made it impossible to see them coming. They would appear suddenly with a mighty roar, clearing a rocky ridge of foothills by a few feet, and tearing over our heads with a deafening sound of engines, machine-guns and cannon. At first they had sprayed the whole dispersal area indiscriminately, but then they concentrated on the Bofors crews, who were serving

their guns unceasingly without cover to protect them. As each fighter roared over our heads, we could see the ground whipped into a cloud of dust all round the guns. Soon the gunners had lowered the elevation until the long barrels were almost horizontal. The fighters came in lower and lower, just clearing the hills and the tops of the scattered vehicles. They flew so low that the guns were scarcely able to fire at them for fear of hitting the trucks. A duel developed between the guns and the fighters, watched breathlessly by the troops from their slit trenches. But the gunners still laboured on until the last enemy aircraft faded away and the sound of their engines grew fainter and fainter in the west.

The honours of the day were shared between the gunners and the Huwaitat. In the First World War the tribes, as such, had played a spectacular rôle under the Amirs Abdulla and Feisal and T. E. Lawrence. In this war the same human material went to make up the Arab Legion, but with the additional advantage of training and discipline. The tribes, however, did not realize the difference, and, hearing that we had left to fight the French in Syria, many Trans-Jordan tribesmen determined to gain fresh laurels. The day before the attack on Juffa, two hired trucks full of Huwaiti tribesmen drove into camp. The bedouins were chanting a battle-song and firing their rifles in the air, somewhat to the consternation of the British Army. Their arrival was not entirely without its drawbacks even to us, for of course they had brought no food. Habforce had 350 miles of lines of communication, and we were living on bully-beef and biscuit.

Next afternoon the Huwaiti contingent were scattered around the camp, sitting in a circle round their coffee-pots or lying asleep in the shade of the trucks. Za'al ibn Mutlaq, a veteran of the Feisal-Lawrence war, was one of the most prominent of the party. Suddenly the whistle blew and the troops jumped down into their slit trenches. "Ya Za'al!" they called. "O Za'al! Come in here with us." But this undignified bobbing into trenches was not Za'al's idea of war. He loaded his old rifle, shook his cloak from off his shoulders and climbed to the top of a rocky knoll overlooking our bivouac. There he stood on the highest pinnacle, a tall figure against the sky in his long white shirt.

As each flight of bombers came in, he raised his rifle to his

shoulder, aimed and fired. Then turning round and reloading, he was in time for a parting shot as the aircraft flew away to the east. But soon the bombers were followed by the fighters, which came roaring in with a deafening sound of guns and engines. It seemed almost as if their wings would sweep that small figure from the summit of his hillock, so low above the hills did they come in. The old man himself was warming to the work. His headgear had fallen off. His thin grey hair was done up in tight little plaits, like a Victorian landlady in curling pins. He was shouting now, calling the name of his sister, and firing right and left as the huge winged monsters tore over his head. The French Air Force never knew of the existence of Shaikh Za'al ibn Mutlaq of the Huwaiti tribe. But to us modern soldiers crouching in our trenches, that single white-clad figure on its hilltop did not seem to be fighting his lone battle in vain.

When the last enemy aircraft disappeared, Za'al ibn Mutlaq came down from his hilltop. He picked up the cloak he had left on the ground and made for the now deserted coffee-pots. "Al harb al yom ma biha leddha (There is no joy in war nowadays)," he said, pouring himself out a cup of coffee.



# XVIII

## *Sukhna*

"Every day is a feast for the girls,  
But this day is our feast day."

ARAB BATTLE SONG.



## SUKHNA

WHILE the Arab Legion had been involved in the attack on Palmyra, its allotted rôle of raiding and reconnaissance had been neglected. The worst result that had ensued had been the extermination of the Warwicks' troop outside T3. But other similar incidents had occurred. Convoys travelling between Juffa and H3 had been fired on by unknown vehicles in the desert. The truck drivers were growing nervous, and the question of strengthening the escorts of all convoys was raised. If the troops available were not enough to assault Palmyra, we could ill afford to reduce them by increasing convoy escorts. The solution seemed to be to find out who these raiders were and to bring them to action. It seemed to me that they might be coming from any of three possible directions.

To the south-west of Palmyra, the enemy's main army was still around Damascus. East of that city, French desert troops still held the fort of Seba' Biyar, or "seven wells." It seemed extremely probable that this outpost was acting as a base for raids on Habforce's communications to H3. But even if it were not, the capture of the fort would bring us great advantages. It would enable our lines of communication to be switched from H3 to H4, and thence to Palestine, a saving of nearly 100 miles.

The range of mountains which ran east and west on the north of Palmyra was almost impassable to wheels. But thirty miles north-east of Palmyra a break in the mountains opened an easy route from northern Syria. In the centre of this gap in the mountains lay the village of Sukhna. If the enemy's raiders were coming through this gap from the north, then the occupation of Sukhna would inevitably bring them to action.

Thirdly, it was possible that the raiding detachments came from the Deir az Zor area on the Upper Euphrates. A vast area of open desert lay between the Upper Euphrates and H3. If,



however, we occupied Sukhna, we should not only close the northern pass, but our patrols could cover the desert as far east as the Euphrates, and thereby cover our communications better than by passively escorting the convoys. At a meeting with General Clark on June 26th, it was agreed that the Arab Legion should first capture and garrison Seba' Biyar, and thus make the lines of communication safe from the west. The advanced base could then also be moved from H<sub>3</sub> to H<sub>4</sub>. This done, we should occupy Sukhna and cover Palmyra from the north and east.

We set out in the afternoon of June 27th. The hills ended a few miles south of Juffa, and we emerged on to almost flat desert. The troops in their trucks began to sing, delighted with the sense of freedom and wide spaces, after the slit trenches around Palmyra. Before sunset we looked back and saw tall columns of grey smoke opening out like mushrooms in the still sky above the Juffa hills. The evening battle had begun and we were not in it. We lay down to sleep in the open desert.

The sun was already up next morning when we came in sight of the French post at Seba' Biyar. It was a low building with machine-gun loopholes visible just above ground level, and was surrounded with barbed wire. The surrounding country was completely open and devoid of an inch of cover. We had no projectile heavier than a .303 bullet. In these circumstances, it was perhaps just as well that the fort surrendered as we drove up. Two Frenchmen stood in the gateway of the barbed wire. As I walked in, a wave of our own soldiers tried to surge in behind me. I had to stand in the doorway and sternly order them back. Even so, when I turned round and entered the fort, a number of them surged forward again, led by a tall man of the Shammar tribe called Saud Hammåd. This man had perfect classical features, framed by long auburn corkscrew curls, and looked like a saint. The troops were extremely disappointed at the enemy's tame surrender. They had thought that they were going to have a battle after their own hearts—a wild charge, the intoxication of battle, victory and plunder. Instead of which a little French warrant-officer was explaining volubly how he had always been in sympathy with De Gaulle. As I walked round with the Frenchman, some of the men knocked over the photograph of his wife

and upset the table. He screamed at them, poor little man, and then burst into tears. Leaving a troop to hold the fort, we embarked the prisoners on our trucks and took them down to H4. The same afternoon we started back across the desert for Palmyra.

On June 28th, a turn for the better took place in the situation at Palmyra. For just a week, the sky had been entirely monopolized by the enemy. "Entirely" is no exaggeration. It was not that the enemy had a superiority in the air. Literally not one single British aircraft had been allotted to support us. The enemy, on the other hand, seemed to have considerable numbers of bombers and fighters. The explanation was provided by the pilot of a bomber which was shot down, who stated that he and his squadron had arrived in Syria a few days before from Oran in North Africa.

On the morning of June 28th, however, a number of Tomahawk fighters from an Australian squadron arrived over Palmyra just as the enemy's bombers were attacking our troops in their trenches. The Australians gave chase and shot down six enemy bombers in a few minutes, while the troops in their trenches stood up and cheered.

At dawn on June 29th, the Arab Legion drove out of the camp at Juffa to take Sukhna. We did not know whether the village was occupied, and approached it with caution. But when we appeared on the white stony hills south of the oasis, the villagers came to greet us. We left half our strength digging in on a hill east of the village, and with the remainder of our force we passed through the gap in the mountains and out into another open plain to the north.

We were on the move again at dawn next morning, and carried out a wide sweep of the great northern plain. We passed several camps of the Sba'a, one of the divisions of the great Aneizah tribe. In Sukhna, we had been told a story of seventy French armoured cars coming from Aleppo, and had sent it back as we heard it. But our two-day sweep of the northern plain revealed no sign of the enemy. We returned to Sukhna to find that General Clark had sent a squadron of the Household Cavalry to support us.

Next day we made a shorter reconnaissance to the east, again with no definite result, although we heard vague stories of French desert cars watering at a well south of Sukhna.

On the morning of July 1st, I woke early. The pale light of dawn was beginning to spread from the east. The air was cool and fresh, and I lay inhaling its morning fragrance while the light spread. Then I kicked off my blankets and put on my shoes. I walked over to talk to one of the sentries, and then wandered down the line of weapon pits in which the men were sleeping. They had dug these pits while I was away on the northern reconnaissance. I was annoyed to see how badly they were sited. Some of the automatics had no field of fire at all. Lucky we were not attacked, I thought to myself.

We had decided to have a day's rest in our bivouac that day to clean up and look over our vehicles. Before sunrise we woke the men. The position we had occupied had been selected for its suitability for defence and because it covered the roads leading north and east from Sukhna. It was on a bare gravelly ridge. Soon after sunrise, I told the infantry to get into their trucks and drive a mile down the wadi to where some scattered bushes provided firewood. They were to make tea and breakfast. The troop of armoured cars and a troop of infantry remained with us on the position. It was about half-past seven, when my attention was called to a column of vehicles which was approaching us from the east. It was coming up the main road from Deir az Zor. As our position lay astride of the road, the column was coming straight for where we were standing. Somehow it seemed to me incredible that they could be hostile. They seemed to be driving along so peacefully. Most of the vehicles seemed to be trucks with tarpaulin covers. They had no advanced guard out in front, but were travelling as a single convoy. I wondered if a ration convoy from H4 could have lost its way. "There are no troops east of us here," said Sergeant Fahad ash Shuraiti significantly. "Jump into this car and go and meet them," I said to him, pointing to an 8-cwt. pick-up standing close by. "Come on, Sagr, you get in the back. If they are enemy, fire a red Very light." Fahad and Sagr looked a little dubiously at the now rapidly approaching column, the clouds of dust billowing away behind the line of trucks. But they said, "As you order," and the pick-up shot off down the track. I sent somebody to call the armoured cars up, and stood on the ridge watching. The pick-up was close to the leading vehicles now—perhaps

a mile from where we stood. Suddenly we heard the rat-tat-tat of a machine-gun, the pick-up turned in a cloud of dust and came racing back toward us. A red signal light soared up into the air. "A distinctly unfriendly act!" remarked Lash at my elbow.

For the moment my mind was in a whirl. After all our care, our intelligence and our reconnaissance here we were with three locally-made armoured cars and thirty infantry, exactly in the path of an advancing enemy column. The rest of our force was a mile away round a bend in the valley, making breakfast in complete ignorance of our situation. The Household Cavalry squadron was much nearer, only about 400 yards behind us, in the gardens of Sukhna. Sending a truck to call up our breakfasters, I told Lash to hang on to the ridge with the armoured cars, jumped into my car and drove down the twisting track into the oasis. The Household Cavalry had dispersed their vehicles in the gardens so as to be invisible from the air. Captain Young, the Squadron Commander, was shaving. I told him we were being attacked. He promised to support us at once, and I swung the wheel of my car, and bumped and bounced back up the rocky ridge. Above me, I could hear the intermittent stutter of machine-guns.

When I came out on the ridge, our three armoured cars were in position firing at the enemy. Such infantry as we had were extended between the armoured cars. The enemy's infantry had got out of their vehicles some 500 yards from our armoured cars, but were unable to advance towards us in the face of our fire. Enemy armoured cars appeared to be trying to drive round our left flank. As I stood beside Lash, a burst of machine-gun fire came from our left. A man suddenly stood up, and then fell forward on his face. I could not see where this fire was coming from.

A man came running back to us from the armoured cars. "May we advance?" he called excitedly. "Allow us to advance. We easily can." "No, no!" I said. "Wait till I get our people up."

The enemy's infantry were obviously unable to advance up 400 yards of smooth gravel slope against our three armoured cars. Meanwhile, they were lying in the open desert and suffering casualties. The enemy did not know that our main body was having

breakfast in a valley a mile to their left. If only they would appear behind the enemy's left flank, we might completely cut off his retreat. I jumped into my car and drove on to a hillock to the right, towards the position of the breakfasters. I got out of the car and held the black flag (our signal to rally) above my head. Still they did not come. The bare rolling desert lay in front of me, beginning already to shimmer in the summer mirage. Not a soul was in sight. I danced in my impatience, cursing their slowness on a morning of battle.

By misfortune, the infantry who lay extended between our armoured cars included some old fighters, the veterans of many raids and battles. Rimaithan had been famous amongst Shammar warriors. Sa'ad Kuleiban had fought under Feisal and Lawrence. Hamdan Auda had survived a hundred fights. These old worthies were indifferent to tactical combinations. Military discipline sat on them but lightly. All they knew was that this was a battle. If the enemy would not come to them, they would go to him. "Wei al nishama?" called Rimaithan, leaping to his feet. "Where are the gallants? Where are they?"

Sa'ad and Hamdan were with him in a second, and the three of them raced down the slope towards the enemy's infantry line. The remainder of the infantry were only a few yards behind, and the armoured cars soon joined the charge. The enemy's infantry, although five times more numerous, were swept away by the violence of this charge, but his vehicles, like a flock of stampeding camels, raced away to the east in clouds of dust. The impetuosity of our own men had spoiled my tactical plan.

Just at this moment, the first of our infantry trucks appeared from the right and, seeing the black flag, drove up in my direction. I could wait no longer. Jumping into my car, I seized the wheel and drove off at full speed. The infantry trucks, strung out in a long line, pursued me in clouds of dust. The enemy's vehicles were driving parallel to us and about 400 yards to our left. The battle soon became a race. If we had stopped to fire, we should have lost ground. We merely drove. The enemy had the advantage for he was following the track, while we were going up and down over hills and across sandy water-courses. Mixed with their trucks were armoured scout cars, one of which kept firing bursts

from a machine-gun, but without any visible effect. I could see the panic-stricken drivers of their trucks stooping forward over their steering wheels and casting anxious glances towards us. My eyes fixed on the enemy racing parallel to us, I nearly drove over a fifteen-foot cliff in our front. A scream from the occupants of the car enabled me to pull up just in time.

By this time a number of our infantry trucks had overtaken us and were driving parallel to us on the right and left. Many of the men were standing up, their long hair flying in the wind. They brandished their rifles and shouted: "Where are they? The gallants, where are they?" My own car was full of people. I did not know how they got there. Several were soldiers who seemed to have borrowed a lift. We were still followed by tribal volunteers from the Huwaitat. One of these, Jazi ibn Isa, was standing on the running-board of the car, making it remarkably difficult for me to drive. He was in a paroxysm of excitement, shouting his war-cries. Every now and then he thrust a tousled head in at the window and bellowed exhortations in my ear. At intervals he fired a rusty rifle into space at no particular target.

Meanwhile, we had been gaining slowly on the enemy's convoy, and I had also been gradually drawing in towards them. Now we were only 200 yards from the road. Seeing that they might be cut off, the enemy's leading vehicles turned away from us, left the track and endeavoured to escape up a side valley into the mountains. This move was their ruin. They ran into a dry water-course, paused to find a crossing and we were into them. One truck crashed across and made away into the hills. The Arab Legion were off their trucks in an instant and on to the enemy. Dragged from their seats, flung on the ground and disarmed, the enemy was overwhelmed.

As I scrambled from my car, three French officers got out of an armoured scout car in front of me. I was wearing an Arab kerchief on my head. They looked at me in alarm. "Je suis Anglais, messieurs," I said, but their distaste seemed by no means lessened by the information. Meanwhile, our infantry had come up, and the enemy prisoners and vehicles were being collected. I took three French and one Syrian officer back in my car. As we drove along, one of the French officers took off his steel helmet.

"I have had this since I was at St. Cyr," he said. "Now I shall not need it any more."

The Household Cavalry were annoyed to have missed the hunt. They had arrived on the ridge just too late. An N.C.O. of the Life Guards claimed that he had followed the Arab Legion counter-attack at sixty miles per hour, but had been unable to overtake it.

The results of our little battle were surprising. The Arab Legion suffered one man killed and one wounded. The French column lost eleven killed and eighty prisoners of war. We captured six armoured cars, four trucks and twelve machine-guns. The unit which had attacked us was the 2nd Light Desert Company from Deir az Zor, which had been responsible for the raids on Hab-force's communications. To the west of Sukhna and between it and the troops besieging Palmyra, General Clark had established his headquarters at the village of Reka. Thus if we had not occupied Sukhna three days before, the first troops encountered by the 2nd Light Desert Company would have been General Clark and his staff. The enemy had three Light Desert Companies. One of them was besieged inside Palmyra. The 2nd from Deir az Zor had been completely destroyed by us. Part of the 1st had formed the garrison of Seba' Biyar and had been taken prisoners by us. After the action of Sukhna, the Syrian deserts were entirely cleared of enemy troops.

The next morning His Highness the Amir received the following telegram in Amman:

"To: His Highness, Amir Abdulla—Amman.

"From: General Wilson.

"Date: 2/7/41.

"The Trans-Jordan Desert Patrol, under Glubb Pasha, carried out yesterday at SUKHNA, a most successful operation, capturing 80 prisoners, 6 armoured cars, and 12 machine-guns. I offer respectful congratulations on spirited action and fighting qualities of your troops."

While we had been attacking Baghdad five weeks earlier, the 10th Indian Division had been landing in Basra. In the interval they had moved northwards, and were now advancing up the

Euphrates. I agreed with General Clark to establish contact with them, and Lash left with a column which joined the Indian Division the day they captured Deir az Zor.

Meanwhile, our little victory at Sukhna had produced further repercussions. It had resulted in the extermination of the 2nd Light Desert Company. The 3rd Light Desert Company was besieged in Palmyra. When the news of the destruction of the 2nd Company at Sukhna reached the garrison, the 3rd Company refused to continue the struggle. Thus weakened, the garrison of Palmyra surrendered on the night of July 2nd-3rd, 1941. I visited Deir az Zor to concert with the 10th Indian Division the final advance on Hama and Aleppo.

The 4th Cavalry Brigade at the same time moved westwards from Palmyra towards the enemy's communications at Homs. On July 7th Qaryatein and Furglus were captured, and the Household Cavalry were engaging enemy armoured cars east of Homs. The enemy's main line of communications was thus closely threatened, for his main army was still south of Homs but based on Aleppo. On the evening of July 11th, we received a signal announcing the "Cease Fire."





# XIX

## *Hope Deferred*

“Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for.”

JOB vi. 8.

“The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon  
Turns Ashes—or it prospers; and anon,  
Like Snow upon the Desert’s dusty Face  
Lighting a little Hour or two—is gone.”

OMAR KHAYYÁM.



## H O P E D E F E R R E D

**B**EFORE the invasion of Syria, the British Government had been apprehensive lest the people of that country should assist the Vichy French in their resistance to our army. We had accordingly been instructed to establish touch with the Syrians, and explain to them that we were coming to free them. As a result of these declarations, the Arabs in almost every case assisted the British forces of invasion. Their reception of the Arab Legion was naturally enough even more enthusiastic. Here, indeed, was a real Arab Army rescuing an oppressed Arab country from foreign domination. The political background was perfect. Although our operations had hitherto been limited to the desert and a few scattered villages, there could be no doubt on which side lay the sympathy of the people. We were everywhere received with warmth, with hope and with practical help. Demonstrations of outward enthusiasm were reduced by the conditions imposed on both us and them by active operations and by fear of French reprisals. Outside Palmyra, for example, we had been welcomed enthusiastically by the Sba'a tribe. I had dined myself at night in the tent of Rawwaf ibn Sa'eed at Reka, a few miles east of the main oasis. Two days later French bombers had attacked the tribal encampment of black tents. Whether this action was in reality a reprisal for the hospitality offered to us, I cannot say, but the tribes were universally convinced of the fact. Thereafter we did our best to avoid compromising camps or villages by parking vehicles near to them. As the operations progressed, more and more Arabs found their way to our bivouac to welcome our arrival and to offer their services. Meanwhile, the truckloads of Huwaitat volunteers who had come to us first had been followed by cars carrying contingents of Beni Sakhr from Trans-Jordan, all enthusiastically eager to join in the war of liberation. In between battles, patrols and air attacks we sat on the

dusty ground of the desert receiving deputations from the Ghiyath, the Amur, the Sba'a, Ruwallah, Feda'an, Aqaidat and other tribes of eastern Syria. The cordiality of their welcome, while the enemy bombers droned across the sky, owed nothing to party organization or political propaganda. These simple and smiling people touched the heart.

"Oh the blessed hour which has brought you," they said. "We have waited for you for so long. We have suffered from the French for twenty years waiting for you to come."

In reality, the French had not been so unpopular with the tribesmen and the country people as they were with the city dwellers and the politicians. In the Syrian desert we saw the wells built up with cement and fitted with steel pulleys for hauling up the water, which even in Trans-Jordan did not exist.

The politicians accused the French of deliberately fostering tribal feeling, and supporting nomadic communities in order to divide the Arabs against one another and to breed estrangement between town and country. True it was that although the French repaired the wells in the desert, they discouraged the nomads from taking to agriculture. They did not do this secretly. They openly argued that the bedouins should not be allowed to cultivate. In this respect their policy was the exact reverse of our own in Trans-Jordan, where we took immense trouble to persuade the nomads to plough. French policy towards the bedouins differed from that of Trans-Jordan in another important respect. The French supported the tribal shaikhs almost blindly, and increased their wealth and power. Not all the shaikhs were worthy of such assistance. In Trans-Jordan, while the noble families continued to be treated by the Government with respect, there was no doubt that every tribesman could deal with the Government direct. He was not obliged to do so through his shaikh.

The friction between the British and French in Syria from 1919 to 1945 was most unfortunate. The local representatives of the two nations have often been criticized and charged with spite, jealousy and parochialism. Such charges were not always justified. The fact is that British and French minds are of a different texture. When the same problem is presented to both, they rarely produce the same answer. The policies of France and Britain

towards the Arabs were thus essentially different, if not diametrically opposed. They did not adopt these divergent systems in order to spite one another, but because their minds worked on different lines. To each Government, its own policy seemed the only wise and logical one. It so happened, however, that the British policy was more popular with the Arabs than the French policy, with the result that the Syrians drew, between the two nations, comparisons which were sometimes unfavourable to the French. The latter, perhaps over-ready to believe in the perfidy of Albion, attributed this state of affairs to British propaganda and intrigue. They were entirely mistaken in these suspicions.

No one who had lived in France or known the French in their own country could fail to be struck by the contrast between the French in France and in Syria. Perhaps it was their love for the soil of France which accounted for the failure of the French in the Levant. Many of those who love England most choose voluntarily to spend their lives far from her. But the best of Frenchmen seem to leave unwillingly the soil of their native country. How little do they know of France who saw the French only in Syria! There was no suggestion there of the France of chivalry, the land of politeness. Nothing suggested the France of Cyrano, the France of glory, the France of Chartres, the villages of Savoy, the châteaux or the churches. The kindness of French working people or the charity of the poor were not to be suspected by those who met the French forces in Syria.

The five weeks of fighting which led to the occupation of Syria had caused less of a breakdown in law and order than might have been expected. Some disorders, had, however, taken place, and the tribes had looted each other's flocks east of the Euphrates. To restore and maintain order in an area twice the size of England—this was indeed a task which the Arab Legion was eminently capable of performing. It was also a task worth doing, not only out of love for the people and the professional pride of the artist in his art, but because Russia was now in the war. The Arab countries were to be the link between Great Britain and Russia. The two great Allies were already meeting in Persia. The war had turned eastward from Britain and France, and was pressing into Russia and threatening Egypt, Turkey and the Arab countries.

The Arab Legion Mechanized Regiment moved to Deir az Zor on the Euphrates. Raiding had taken place between the Baggara and a section of the Feda'an. We surprised the camp of the Feda'an at dawn, recovered from them the animals raided and settled the feud in a few hours.

The Turks complained of sheep-lifting on their frontier with Syria. We went up to investigate, held a liaison meeting with the Turkish governor and gendarmerie officer, and settled the dispute. Our little campaign in Iraq and Palmyra had invested the Arab Legion with a halo of glory. This prestige added immensely to our power to keep the peace. We found ourselves maintaining order from Aqaba on the Red Sea to the frontiers of Anatolia. Not only was this vital war-work—it was also of absorbing human interest.

In the preparatory work undertaken before the invasion of Syria, it had been assumed by one and all that French control of Syria was at an end. The official Government of France was assisting the enemy. The French rulers of Syria had refuelled German aircraft and sent trains of munitions to the usurping Government of Baghdad. Both British and Arabs assumed that Syria would be controlled by Great Britain until the end of the war, and would then become independent in the same manner as Iraq. It was, therefore, with no little surprise and consternation that we heard that the French were to continue to govern Syria. It is true that the new rulers of the country were to be the Free French and not the Vichy French. But the difference between the two was one affecting their attitude towards Germany, and was a matter of indifference to the Syrians. Many of the latter, encouraged by our invasion, had assisted us against the French during the operations. Although the Free French had fought on our side against the Vichy French, their national feelings caused them to fraternize with the Vichy French when the operations were over. Many of those who had fought for the Vichy French against us now proclaimed themselves converted and rallied to the cause of the Free French and the Allies. These were often confirmed by the Free French in the same posts which they had held under the Vichy rulers. Cases even occurred in which the Syrians, anxious to help the British invaders, had acted in a hostile manner

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NAWAB SALAR JUNG BAHADUR



1st Regiment, Arab Legion, on parade with home-made armoured cars, 1942







3-inch mortar team training

*Imperial War Museum*



to their local French commander. No sooner was the invasion completed, however, than the same French commander declared himself converted to General De Gaulle, and was posted once more to his former district. The bewildered Syrians, who had fought against this officer at the behest of the British, suddenly found their enemy once more in the saddle. Moreover, by a quick turn of his coat, the Frenchman now enjoyed the support of the British Army to keep the Syrians in order.

The situation gave rise to intense feeling. It was just one more of those misunderstandings—tissues of conflicting promises—which had given us so much trouble in Palestine and the Arab countries after the First World War. Presumably in London the Free French had been promised the control of Syria before the invasion commenced. Apparently the commanders in the Middle East were not aware of the promise. Certain it is that no mention of it was made to us. Before the invasion, we were told to place ourselves in touch with the Syrians to ensure that they would not support the Vichy French against the British forces of invasion. Such propaganda inevitably took the form of the liberation of Syria from French control. His Majesty's Government conquered Syria in 1941 by force of arms. They were not compelled to promise to liberate the Syrians. They were entitled to give Syria to the Free French. But they should have made their intention clear to us before the invasion began. These mistakes, hatreds and reproaches are now happily past, but they caused no small heart-burning at the time.

The first I knew of this reversal of policy, as it seemed to us, was a telegram from British Army headquarters. The message reported that the Free French had complained that I had been guilty of propaganda against the French Republic. The charge obscured the point of the situation. Any propaganda emanating from me had been, of course, directed against the Vichy French, the active allies of Germany. Suffice it to say, that as a result of French representations the employment of the Arab Legion to keep order in eastern Syria was discontinued.

While the British commanders were trying to reconcile these parochial jealousies, the war began to make fresh demands upon .

us. The enemy was expected to invade Turkey, force his way through Anatolia and appear on the northern frontier of Syria. It was estimated that he might reach northern Syria in two months. The respite granted to us by the occupation of Syria and Iraq might be but a short breathing-space. Next time our opponents would be the German Army itself.

The exploits of the Arab Legion in front of Baghdad and Palmyra had taken the British Army by surprise. Few if any British commanders had so much as heard of the Arab Legion. None had seriously considered it as a fighting force. Now all this was changed. A British Brigadier visited me in Amman to ask me what hopes there were of increasing our strength. "These fellows," he said, "are brave, hardy, full of dash and well-disciplined. The very stuff that is wanted. What can you do about it?"

The Trans-Jordan Government was approached. The Amir Abdulla had long ago burned his boats. In the Press, on the radio and in public speeches His Highness had reiterated again and again that he and his country would live or die with Britain. "Arabs do not abandon their friends just because the times are bad," he said.

The constant virulent abuse of His Highness in the Berlin Arabic broadcast showed that the enemy attached considerable importance to the staunchness of the Amir's stand. He welcomed the proposal for expansion. As a first step, it was decided to complete the 1st Regiment and to raise a 2nd. Not long afterwards, a 3rd Regiment and a brigade headquarters were added. The commander-in-chief suggested that an attempt be made to raise six regiments.

While these demands for ever more and more units were, to say the least, gratifying, the expansion was by no means easy to carry out. The British Army offered money and uniforms but no vehicles. We decided to fend for ourselves and cabled to the Ford Company in America for 400 truck chassis. The Arab Legion then took up the production of armoured cars. We designed a new armoured car with a pencil and a piece of paper. No armour-plating was available, and we were obliged to use mild-steel sheets. We experimented with mild-steel sheets with three-ply

wood between, to cause the bullets to splay. When steel could no longer be obtained, an officer of the Arab Legion, the late Major Lord Apsley, flew to India and bought it there. In these days of 1941 the U.S.A. was not in the war, and supply was not controlled, as it later became. The Ford Company duly shipped 400 truck chassis from America for the Arab Legion. Unfortunately, the ship carrying 150 of them was torpedoed in the Atlantic. Before any more could be purchased, Pearl Harbour had happened and the export of vehicles from the United States was forbidden. Meanwhile, however, the Arab Legion had built no fewer than 100 armoured cars to its own design and from its own resources and purchases.

The expansion of the Mechanized Regiments was in full swing. The camp chosen for the training of the recruits was at Azraq, a desert oasis sixty miles east of Amman. It was from here that Lawrence had made his last raid to cut the railway near Deraa at the end of the First World War. "We rested there two days, the refreshment of the pools being so great," he wrote in *Revolt in the Desert*. Here hundreds after hundreds of bedouins poured in to enlist. If only some foundation had been laid before the war, what an army we could have produced. If only the British Government had allowed us to begin in September 1939, when Trans-Jordan first offered her co-operation! If only even now, vehicles and weapons had been ready. But our tragedy was the tragedy of the whole British Empire and the United States. We had to build up from nothing, with the war already in progress and all materials in short supply.

With all this frenzy of enlisting, training and arming, we were still preparing for our rôle in the defence of the Arab countries should the Germans come through Anatolia. In that event, the scant British forces available were to form up on the southern frontier of Turkey from the Mediterranean to east of Mosul. Here a more or less continuous line could be formed. But when they commenced to retire, as they undoubtedly would in view of the scarcity of their numbers, the Syrian desert would perforce open a gap in the line. One army would retire southwards through Syria and Lebanon to Trans-Jordan and Palestine. The other

would be obliged to retreat down the Tigris and Euphrates to the Persian Gulf. The nearly waterless Syrian desert, incapable of supporting large armies, would intervene between the two. To fill this great desert gap, 500 miles wide in the south, would be the task of the Arab Legion Mechanized Brigade which was now enlisting and training at Azraq.

I went over the whole Syrian desert carefully to study its physical structure, and then drew up an appreciation. The most outstanding physical features in the area seemed to be:

(a) The line of hills from Damascus to Palmyra, and thence to the Euphrates north of Deir az Zor. The same chain was continued through the Jebel Abdul Aziz and Jebel Sinjar to Mosul. The greater part of this range was impassable to wheels, with the exception of gaps at Palmyra, two near Sukhna and the river valleys of the Euphrates and Khabur. With these gaps blocked, the enemy's advance would be confined to the west of Palmyra.

(b) If the enemy were to break through these mountains, he would emerge on to the great plains of the Syrian desert. He might turn in westwards for Damascus, passing through a narrow gap at Adhra. It was through this pass that Khalid ibn al Waleed had threatened the Byzantine garrison of Damascus 1,300 years before.

If he did not force this gap, the enemy would be obliged to continue southwards past the eastern verge of the Jebel Druze. The desert here is almost waterless. He could attempt to turn in through the lava belt to Azraq and Amman. The lava belt is 100 miles wide, and almost completely impassable to wheels, except along the Haifa-Baghdad road. Thus our defence line would swing round on Damascus as a pivot and then follow the line of the lava. Contact with Iraq would be lost when the enemy broke through the lava, except by small detachments using stealth. If the enemy crossed the lava and entered Trans-Jordan, the next natural line of resistance would be the Jordan valley. In these circumstances, Palestine would become a fortress, defended on the north by a line from the Sea of Galilee to the Mediterranean and on the east by the line of the Jordan valley from the Sea of Galilee to Aqaba.

In so close a siege and with Trans-Jordan lost, our desert

brigade might be of more value if it kept out of the fortress and lay scattered in the great desert. If the enemy were to infringe the neutrality of Saudi Arabia, we might retire into that country.

When our lines of communication had run across the desert from H3 to Palmyra, the French had caused some anxiety and inconvenience by raiding them. The mistake they made was to grow elated by their early successes and to offer us battle at Sukhna and be exterminated. If the Germans came down the Syrian desert from the north, the Arab Legion would play the rôle of communications raider. The policy we decided upon was to be divided into as many small parties as possible, and be always appearing, shooting, disappearing and cutting off stray vehicles. The desert, though now negotiable with ease by wheels, would be to the enemy a hostile and strange land to be crossed as quickly as possible. To us it was home.

Our difficulty would be petrol. Mechanized forces seem so much more mobile than camels, but in reality this mobility is conditioned by a source of petrol supply. Without this, our guerilla raids could scarcely last more than a week or two. If both we and the enemy had been operating thirty years earlier in the days of camels, our potential power of interference with his communications would have been far greater. Still, we occupied ourselves diligently in finding hide-outs in the desert where we could lie up on our raiding campaign.

Amid these innumerable activities, the next two years were a long series of frustrations and disappointments. The campaigns in Syria and Iraq had raised the morale of the troops to the sky. They were burning for fresh enterprises and new enemies. The control of the whole Syrian desert from Turkey to the Red Sea was a task of great importance, which we could have performed better than any other troops in the world. We were debarred from performing it by the political jealousy of the Free French.

To operate in the Syrian desert in the event of the arrival of the Germans was a rôle suitable to our desert regiments. Throughout the spring and summer of 1942, we reconnoitred both the Syrian desert and the Jezirah between the Tigris and the Euphrates in Iraq, in preparation for this task. In the autumn of 1943 it



became increasingly evident that the Germans were unlikely ever to invade Syria.

Meanwhile, in the Western Desert, the Long-range Desert Group was carrying out the exploits which made it famous. It consisted entirely of Europeans. I was convinced that the employment of real bedouins on a similar task would produce an even greater effect. In addition, I had little doubt that here also the appearance of Arab tribesmen fighting on the British side would have a profound effect on the local population. We might even infiltrate our men into Cyrenaica and Tripoli behind the German lines, and make things more difficult for the enemy. I still believe that the Arab Legion might have played a rôle of considerable importance in North Africa in 1942.

Two factors lost us this opportunity. The first was the enthusiasm of the British Army command at the end of the Iraq and Syrian campaigns. This enthusiasm led to a demand for more and more expansion, and thereby incapacitated the Mechanized Regiment for action for over a year. All the old soldiers had to be made into instructors for the new recruits. Equipment inadequate for one regiment had to be distributed over three. New British officers arrived to train the troops, ignorant of the customs and character of the men. Friction, resentment and ill-feeling ensued on both sides. If no expansion had taken place, and if Lash and I had taken the men of Habbaniya and Palmyra to the Western Desert, our bedouins might have played a rôle in which their martial qualities could have found a wider field.

Apart from the question of expansion, the Syrian desert rôle tied us to the north. In the autumn of 1942, when a German invasion of Syria seemed increasingly improbable, I paid several visits to G.H.Q. in Cairo. When Rommel broke through and advanced to Alamein, the Arab Legion was moved to Sinai. We prepared maps of the Sinai Desert and reconnoitred positions. If Rommel occupied Egypt, we should fight in Sinai. But Rommel was held up. Again I visited Cairo, and it was agreed that we should send advanced parties to the Western Desert. One of these went to the main front, another joined the Long-range Desert Group. Captain Pilkington of the Household Cavalry Regiment, attached to the Arab Legion, was killed with the second party, when

operating behind the German lines. Just when we seemed to have found a task where we could once more find scope, the Battle of Alamein put the enemy to flight. I flew to Cairo. Could we join in the pursuit? An anxious wait followed. Then a telegram from Eighth Army Headquarters. More troops were not wanted. I went back to Amman.

Meanwhile General Wilson had been in command in Iraq and Persia. "Jumbo" had seen the Arab Legion in the days of Iraq and Syria, and had not forgotten them. The Anglo-Russian invasion of Persia and the fall and exile of Ridha Shah had resulted in a weakening of law and order. Tribes had interfered with traffic on the roads. Meanwhile, Persia had become the principal thoroughfare for Allied help to Russia. Any threat to the free flow of this traffic was of extreme importance. A regiment of the Arab Legion was asked for to deal with the insurgent tribes.

The 1st Regiment was ready for the task with Lash in command, but I decided to go myself for a short time. The problem promised to be one of the political-officer type, rather than a purely military operation. It would probably be necessary to defeat the tribes in the earlier engagements, but then diplomacy and tact would be needed to complete their pacification.

The road from Haifa to Baghdad had now been tarred and metalled the whole way across the desert. It was one of the main arteries of the war. Convoy followed convoy in constant succession going both east and west. Troops, stores, drafts, munitions for Russia rumbled behind one another in an unbroken stream of traffic. It was curious to be routed across our own desert by British staff officers. It took four days to reach Baghdad along the main road, whereas we had done it in eighteen hours across the open desert two years before. In 1924 the same crossing had taken me thirty days on a camel.

In Baghdad we were piloted into a transit camp, in the centre of a vast city of tents, swarming with British and Indian troops. Next day we passed slowly through the traffic of the city, and then re-formed our column on the open road beyond. All around us lay the flat alluvial plain of Iraq. Behind us lay the chimneys and minarets of Baghdad under a thin haze of smoke. Long lines

of high banks intersected the plain, the remains of ancient canals dating perhaps from Darius or Haroun al Rasheed. On our right, lines of dark green on the horizon marked the date-palm gardens on the Diyala. The plain was covered with damp, fresh fields of green wheat. Scattered parties of Arabs on foot or on donkeys were coming into the city with farm produce. The January air had the cool fresh intoxication of iced champagne. We were heading for Persia and fresh adventure.

The same evening we camped beyond Khanikin, within a short distance of the Persian frontier. Above us we could see the first mountain slopes, already powdered with snow. Next day we should cross the high passes. We received instructions how to avoid frost-bite—rub the feet with grease, and abstain from taking off one's boots at night. We lay down to sleep, tired and aching, but full of excitement and hope.

But early next morning came a signal cancelling our move and ordering us to remain stationary. A passing Brigadier told us that the Persian Government had objected to our employment on internal security in Persia. Throughout these years, the anomalous political situation of Trans-Jordan seemed to confront us at every turn. If we were to be given a rôle in any other country, we were told that Trans-Jordan was an independent State and that other countries objected to the entry of the Trans-Jordan army. But if we wished to declare war and become Allies, we were informed that Trans-Jordan was under a mandate. The British Government, always anxious to please everybody, never seemed willing to resist any of the objections raised.

I hastened to Baghdad to see General "Jumbo" Wilson. Still smiling, he admitted that the Persian Government had objected to our employment. It was doubtful whether His Majesty's Government would be willing to press the matter. For a moment I thought of going to Teheran myself, but Jumbo did not think it would help.

Jumbo was kind and sympathetic. As I walked out of his office, my feet seemed too heavy. I could scarcely drag them along. What was the good of it all?

First the control of Syria; then operations in the Syrian desert; then raiding in North Africa. Now the operations in Persia had

fallen through. The stars in their courses seemed to fight against us. I refused an invitation to lunch, stumbled into my car and drove back to Khanikin.

Meanwhile the Allies were gaining fresh victories in other theatres, but we still continued our training. The enemy was driven from Africa. Sicily was invaded and then Italy. Then there was the landing in Normandy.

We received a directive from the General Staff. The Mechanized Brigade of the Arab Legion might be employed in the Balkan peninsula in the event of an Allied landing there. The terrain would consist of mountain ranges, covered in places with forests.

The Mechanized Brigade had been raised and trained for a very different type of operations in open rolling desert. It had been practised in travelling over vast distances, usually in open order and away from roads. The new rôle reversed much of this. The country was to be close, with high mountains and vegetation. Movement away from the road might be impossible. In place of wide sweeps of many hundred miles round the enemy's flanks, foot-by-foot fighting might be the order of the day.

The composition of the regiments was changed. The number of armoured cars was reduced, the number of infantry increased. The artillery, which had been equipped with American 75-mm. field guns, was now given 3·7-inch mountain guns. The Mechanized Brigade moved to the Jebel Ajlun for training in mountain warfare. British and Arab officers were sent to the Mountain Warfare Training Centre in Lebanon. We began to acquire mules, and spent anxious moments loading them with pack saddles and transporting the mules themselves in lorries.

Then the Mechanized Brigade was ordered to concentrate in Palestine. Hope revived. General Scobie was preparing a force to go to Greece. He inspected a regiment of the Arab Legion, and liked it. He sent us artillery, signals and R.E.M.E. officers to carry out technical inspections. Our deficiencies of equipment were made up. This time we really were going overseas!

And then again the last of so many disappointments. The Germans were leaving Greece. The British troops might be engaged on internal-security duties rather than on operations

against the enemy. The Greeks might resent the presence of Arab troops on their soil. In brief, Scobie went and the Arab Legion was left behind.

Once more, I took the weary road to G.H.Q., Cairo, already half despairing. Russia was pressing forward now in the East and an Anglo-American landing in the Balkans (apart from Greece) seemed unlikely. I meant to press for our despatch to Italy. But at G.H.Q. I was defeated. The greater part of the Lease-Lend aid to Russia was still going through the Arab countries. The lines of communication with India passed the same way. The pipelines and the Iraq Petroleum Company were vital. It was essential to keep sufficient troops in the Middle East. If the Arab Legion went to Europe, an equivalent number of British troops would have to be sent to replace them in Arabia. Was it not obviously more economical for the European troops to operate in Europe and Arab troops in Arabia? If we desired to serve the common cause of the Allies, the answer was not in doubt.

I had no reply to these arguments. But as I left G.H.Q. I had that feeling of "feet of lead" which I have sometimes experienced in extreme depression. It is as though the moral power-station of the mind had ceased to generate enough current any longer to transport the physical body. As a result, all motion becomes an effort and the body and feet are too heavy to move. This time I knew that it was finished. Four years of strenuous training and buoyant hope seemed to have been wasted. The Arab Legion would never fight on a main front in Europe.

I am a restless person. When great events are happening, I dislike to be out of them. But it was not personal considerations which made me desire to take the Arab Legion to Europe's battlefields. My love for both the peoples I have served—the British and the Arabs—convinced me of the importance of taking the Arab Legion to Europe. I was certain that to fight side by side was the surest way for the British and the Arabs to learn a spirit of comradeship and mutual respect. On a small scale, we had proved this at Palmyra, when a real spirit of friendship and equality had grown up between us and the British troops. It was my hope to be able to extend this feeling of equal comradeship to a wider sphere. It seemed ironical that so many nations and individuals

were obliged to fight who did not want to, whereas the Arab Legion longed to fight in Europe but failed to get the opportunity.

My second reason for wishing the Arab Legion to fight was for the benefit of the Arabs themselves. For I believe the Arab tribesman to be first-class military material. I am convinced that they are the same men who conquered half the world 1,300 years ago. To the world at large, however, they are still unknown. They have not had the opportunity to prove themselves on a major battlefield. If they had done so, they would have emerged with fresh self-confidence, and with the respect of the world—a state of affairs which would have been better for both. But we were unable, in the stress of war, to raise consideration of this matter to so high a political and psychological level. The generals were undoubtedly right on the military and material plane. The Arab Legion was doing vital work in garrisoning the Middle East, which it did better than British or American troops could have done it. Meanwhile, the latter were released for the invasion of Europe. Thereby one of the world's great martial races failed to regain the estimation to which its ancient virtues entitled it, but which centuries of political obscurity had caused to fade into oblivion.



# XX

## *Silent Service*

“With close-lipp’d Patience for our only friend,  
Sad Patience, too near neighbour of Despair.”

MATTHEW ARNOLD: *The Scholar Gipsy*.





## SILENT SERVICE

**H**IS Highness the Amir always chose the moment when Britain's fortunes were at the lowest ebb in order publicly to renew his offers of co-operation. Immediately after the collapse of France in 1940, he offered the Arab Legion for service in North Africa. It was decided that a company of the Arab Legion could guard the aerodrome at Aqir in Palestine.

When the company took over its new duties, with every belt and buckle shining, and drilling like the Grenadier Guards, British Army headquarters were pleased. A few days later they were asking if a second company could be supplied. For the ensuing five years, the appetite of British commanders for Arab Legion infantry companies continued insatiable. More and more companies were raised, but the speed of expansion always lagged behind the demand. Two years after the first infantry company went to Palestine, companies were scattered all over the Middle East. In Persia, in the streets of Baghdad, in the camps and depots in Iraq, along the pipeline across the Syrian desert, on the quays and in the ships in Haifa port, the infantrymen of the Arab Legion were on guard. Some were at Rafah, on the borders of Egypt and Palestine. Parties of Arab Legion supplied the guards on trains from Palestine to Damascus and Cairo. A company was on duty at Aqaba on the Red Sea, when Rommel's advance on Egypt made it necessary to prepare Aqaba port as an alternative to Suez. All over the Middle East, far and wide, the Arab Legion was standing guard in camps and stores, aerodromes and ports, railways and bridges.

The work was often extremely severe. In some cases men were on guard for nine nights out of ten. The normal proportion was six or seven nights on guard or on patrol to one night in bed. Although it is true that these infantry companies were nearly all in Arabic-speaking countries (the only exception was a company

in Persia), they were without exception separated from their families for years.

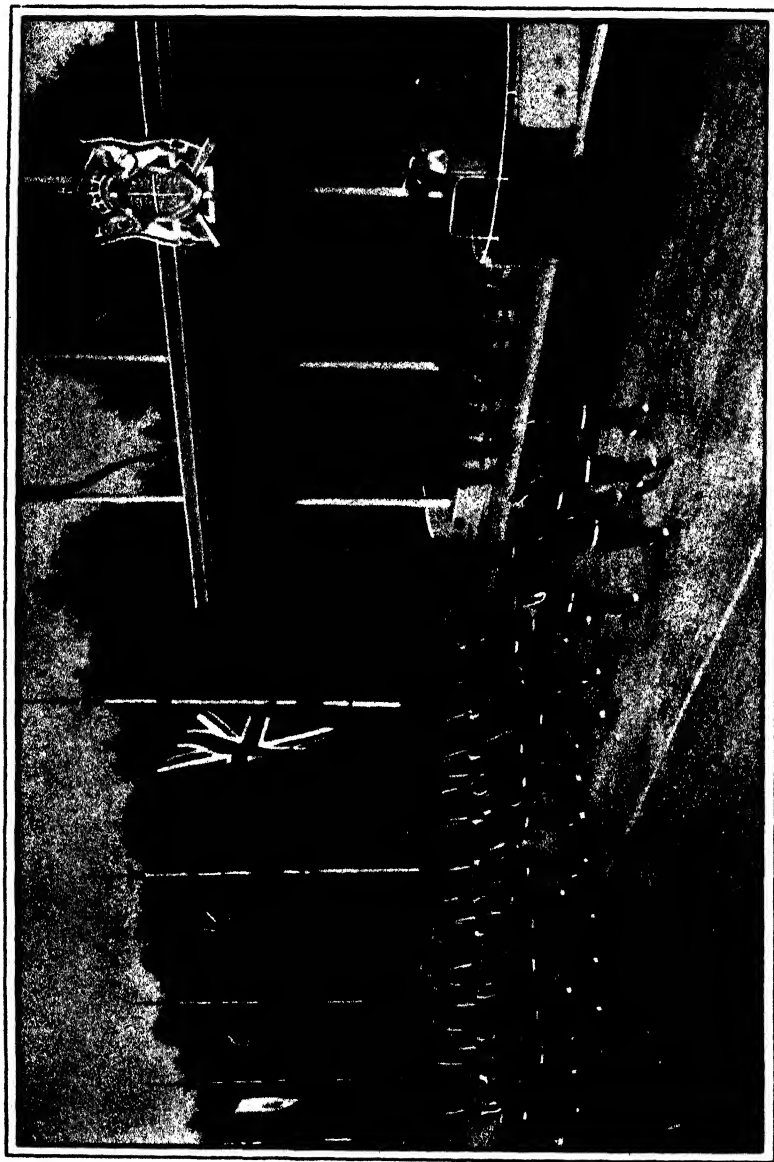
The service itself was no sinecure, for the vast dumps, stores and convoys which covered the Middle East offered an irresistible temptation to robbers. Some of the offenders limited themselves to pilfering by stealth, but in many cases armed gangs of men broke into camps and stores at night in search of loot.

Later on, political terrorism made its appearance in Palestine, and the troops were called upon to resist parties of gunmen determined to sabotage and destroy. The installations and the lines of communication guarded by the Arab Legion served not only to supply two British armies—they were also the principal route for the despatch of Lease-Lend aid to Russia. Hundreds of millions of pounds' worth of weapons, vehicles, explosives, clothing, supplies and every conceivable item required for modern war poured in a ceaseless stream in and out of the port of Haifa, up and down the railways of Egypt, Palestine and Syria, and along the great arterial road from Haifa to Baghdad. A mile or two on either side of the road, the rolling steppes of the Syrian desert quivered in the summer mirage, while the dust devils followed one another like mighty pillars speeding across the dusty plain. The bedouin herd-boys perched high on the backs of their slow camels led their heavy milch herds down the bushy wadis as they had done unchanged for millennia past. Across the centre of these vast plains, on a black ribbon a few yards wide, poured all the latest devices of modern mechanical war. Every stage on this great road from the Mediterranean to Baghdad was guarded by Arab Legion infantry.

To record all the vigils, the stalkings, the ambushes, the shootings would require a volume in itself. The sub-war of gangs and raiders never ceased. The fighting tribes of Iraq were perhaps the most daring raiders of camps, human material not unlike the men of the Arab Legion against whom their wits were pitted. The great dumps at Musaiyib, forty miles south of Baghdad, were surrounded by a double wire fence with a mine-field between. Stripped completely naked, the tribesmen would crawl through the wire, in the hopes particularly of stealing weapons or ammunition. Some trod on the mines and were killed, but the remainder

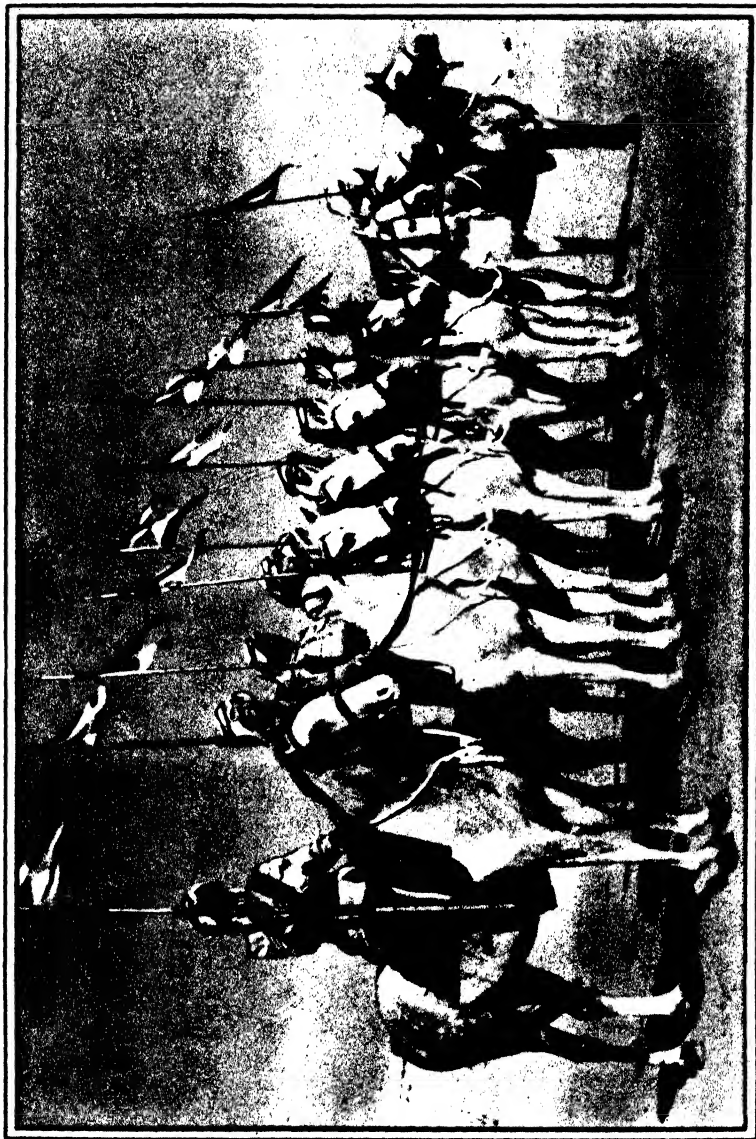


The Mechanised Brigade was recruited from Nomad tribes



Central Press Photos

"We'll show them what Arab soldiers are"



Lancers of the Royal Escort



*C.O.I.*

His Majesty King Abdulla the First in his Palace  
at Amman beneath the portrait of his uncle

were not daunted. They learnt to pick up and disarm the mines and crawl on. They ambushed an Arab Legion patrol and killed one of its members. A gun battle developed in the darkness with pistols and Tommy-guns.

At another time, a lone sentry saw a gang of six cutting through the wire entanglements. He stalked them alone, shot two and brought back the other four prisoners. At a dump in Palestine, an Arab Legion sentry challenged some moving figures in the darkness. The intruders fired immediately, hitting him in two places. One of the bullets fractured his leg. But he dragged himself after them, and overtook them as they collected their loot outside the barbed wire. Kneeling on one knee in the tall grass, he shot one dead, wounded a second, and kept two others covered until the guard came up and arrested them.

One night a post defended by a corporal and six men of the Arab Legion was attacked by a gang of terrorists. One of them advanced towards the sentry, and threw a grenade at him. It burst close to the man's feet and wounded him in six places. He ran forward firing his Tommy-gun, regardless of the blood flowing from his wounds, and the gang of eight terrorists took to headlong flight.

When we slept a night in a transit camp outside Baghdad in 1942, we were warned that thieves would try to steal our weapons. Eight rifles had been stolen the night before from an Indian battalion in the same camp. Thus began the Arab Legion service in Iraq. When it ended three years later, not a single weapon had been stolen from any Arab Legion camp.

The long phase served by the Arab Legion infantry companies as garrison troops was a revelation to me. I had served with Arabs for twenty-five years, and had a deep admiration and love for them. I had always appreciated their dash and enthusiasm—"himasa" was the Arab word—but I had admitted to myself that they were probably lacking in patience, that they would not have the perseverance for trench warfare or a static rôle. I had heard them referred to as "ten-minute soldiers," capable of a single charge and done for if that failed. Yet the men of these infantry companies out-Englished the proverbially dogged English at the endurance of monotony. Year after year of military service,



almost without leave, separated from their families, and doing six nights a week on guard, is a severe test of morale. These men maintained throughout an unflagging enthusiasm and an unwearied vigilance. No gang of raiders or terrorists ever caught them unawares. The secret of their success was their intense military pride. I once asked a young recruit if he was tired. "If I feel tired or sleepy," he answered, "I say to myself: 'Come on, my lad! Remember you're an Arab soldier!' Then I wake up and forget I was sleepy."

WAB SALAR JUNG BAHADUR

The Arab Legion did not go to the battlefields of Europe. When hostilities ended, it was spread far and wide over the Middle East from the mountains of Persia to the Mediterranean. The great bulk of Allied combatant troops had left for Europe, and had bequeathed to us the task of maintaining security and of protecting the oil-fields and pipelines and the Lease-Lend route to Russia. It was a vital but not a spectacular task.

When Victory-in-Europe day arrived, on May 8th, 1945, Trans-Jordan had no need to be ashamed of herself or of her army. From September 1939 to the day of victory, she had not only fought and worked unceasingly—even in the darkest days she had never ceased to offer to do more. Every Allied disaster in the early years produced only a fresh offer of whole-hearted support from Trans-Jordan. When war broke out, His Highness offered his army and his country to the British cause. When France fell and Italy declared war, he pressed for the despatch of the Arab Legion to the Western Desert. When Arabia herself was slipping and Iraq declared war on Britain, the Arab Legion marched on Baghdad. When the Germans controlled Syria, Trans-Jordan sent her little army once more. When Rommel advanced to Alamein, the Arab Legion prepared diligently to join in, and their advanced parties were with the Eighth Army when Rommel was driven out. Both His Highness and the Arab Legion begged again and again to join the Allied armies in Italy, France or the Balkans.

Even in the later stages of the war, Trans-Jordan's contribution was not without distinction. She was the only Middle East country with its own Government whose troops actually fought

n the Allied side. Not only so, but she was the only Middle East country whose troops served outside her own frontiers. From the fall of France in June 1940 until long after the end of the war, almost all the military units of the Arab Legion were serving continuously outside their own country. The great majority, it is true, were in Arab countries, but those in Iraq were farther from their homes than the British Army in Germany was from England. Even those in Palestine were as far from their families as a British Army in France from theirs.

In every Middle East country except Trans-Jordan, the Allied commanders were obliged to retain combatant troops throughout the whole war, in order to ensure stability and order. In Trans-Jordan no Allied fighting troops were ever stationed for this purpose. She not only looked after herself without outside assistance, but she gave the whole of her army to serve beyond her frontiers without a moment's anxiety as to her own internal security.

Perhaps even more remarkable was the conduct and discipline of the Arab Legion soldiers. A strength equivalent to several battalions served in Iraq for over three years. When they left that country, the Commander of the Allied Forces in Iraq and Persia wrote a letter to Arab Legion Headquarters. In it he said that for the whole three years during which Arab Legion units had served in those countries, not one serious case of misconduct or indiscipline had come to the notice of the Allied High Command. Few armies in war-time are entirely free from cases of drunkenness, rape, robbery and brutality, but not one incident of this nature by men of the Arab Legion had been reported to the Allied Command.

The triumphs of the Arab Legion were triumphs of the spirit. These men, who never committed crimes and never even accosted women, were not graduates of Eton and Oxford. Many were half-wild tribesmen who, a few years before, would have thought little of cutting the throat of an enemy. But they were filled with an immense pride in the race from which they sprung, in the Arab Army to which they belonged, and in the martial traditions of their ancestors. Leaving for the first time their remote mountain villages or wandering desert tribes, they found themselves suddenly

the cynosure of every eye, and the comrades of the soldiers of strange nations of some of whom they had never even heard. They were not the men to disgrace their ancestors and their companions before foreigners.

On June 8th, 1946, an Arab Legion contingent was taking part in the Victory Day march in the streets of London. As they passed under the Admiralty Arch and faced up the long expanse of the Mall to the saluting base, a whisper went round the ranks. The spectators heard nothing above the sound of the cheering. They did not even see the lips move. But that whispered message tautened every muscle and made every eye sparkle. "Now then, gallants," it said, "we'll show them what Arab soldiers are!"

As they swung down the Mall, the crescendo of cheers which ran along the crowds beside them showed that some at least of the British public had seen and noticed. Unknown voices cried out: "Good old Trans-Jordan!" "Well done, Arab Legion!"—some old soldiers, perhaps, who had served with these men in the dusty glare of Iraq or Syria.

This whisper which passed round the ranks in the Mall on Victory Day might have been taken as the Arab Legion motto throughout the war. The cry of a private soldier on a tedious parade in a strange country, it epitomized the spirit which carried so many thousands of these men through nearly seven years of war. "We'll show them what Arab soldiers are!"

The visit of the Arab Legion contingent to England for the Victory Day Parade in 1946 produced a remarkable reunion with the Household Cavalry Regiment. The Arab Legion detachment had brought with them a replica of an Arab Legion Colour made in Damascus silk. At a ceremonial parade at Windsor, the Colour was presented to the Household Cavalry in memory of the comradeship of 1941.

Lieutenant-Colonel F. Gooch, who had commanded the Household Cavalry at Palmyra, was by a happy coincidence still in command of the regiment at Windsor. The Cavalry presented the Arab Legion with a pair of silver trumpets.

But perhaps an even more affecting reunion took place when the parade was dismissed. In an earlier chapter, I have told how

an Arab Legion vehicle was left to guide the Household Cavalry across the desert into Habbaniya on the morning of May 16th, 1941. The column had been attacked by Messerschmidt fighters, which two Arab Legion soldiers with a Lewis gun had attempted to resist. A burst of fire from one of the fighters had wrecked the truck, killed Mutr Fuqaan and left Muhrad Sulaiman lying on the ground with the gash of a bullet wound across his face. A trooper of the Life Guards had picked up Muhrad Sulaiman and carried him to an ambulance.

Muhrad recovered from his wound, and rose to be a sergeant. His rescuer had become a corporal of horse. The two recognized one another once more on the barrack square at Windsor. They were given the afternoon off by their respective commanding officers, and set out together to see the sights of London. The fact that they possessed no language in common did not seem to detract from the happiness of either.

When her army invaded Syria and the Lebanon in June 1941, Great Britain proclaimed the independence of these two countries. The proclamation was made at that moment in order to avoid the possibility that the inhabitants of those countries might assist the German and Vichy French defenders. Meanwhile, however, Trans-Jordan, whose army formed part of the Allied invasion forces, was still under a mandate. It is true that Great Britain had given the mandate a generous interpretation, and Trans-Jordan had for many years enjoyed virtual independence, under her own ruler and cabinet. In spite of this, however, the situation was ironical. In the international sphere, Trans-Jordan was still under a mandate. The only Arab country which was actively fighting for the Allied cause was the only Arab country the independence of which had not been legally recognized.

While the war lasted the matter was left in suspense, but in February 1946, His Highness went to England with the Prime Minister, Ibrahim Pasha Hashim. A new treaty was negotiated with Great Britain finally ending the mandate. The treaty was deposited with the United Nations Organization.

May 25th had been the day of the proclamation of the Trans-Jordan State when it had been created after the First World War.

The day had always been a public holiday. May 25th, 1946, was celebrated with unprecedented rejoicing. Trucks and buses crowded with singing peasants began to arrive in Amman at sunrise. The streets of the town in its narrow valleys between the hills were crowded with every form of traffic. Throngs of people in their best clothes jostled on the pavements and, indeed, all over the roads. Lean tribesmen pushed through the crowd, riding their Arab ponies. Cabinet Ministers in morning coats passed in shining cars. Buses, crowded with villagers and decorated with branches, flags and ribbons, moved slowly through the press with much shouting and sounding of horns.

In the morning the Legislative Assembly unanimously adopted an amendment to the constitution, changing the country from an Amirate into a Kingdom. At eleven o'clock, His Majesty Abdulla the First was proclaimed King in the Throne Room of the Palace. At noon, tens of thousands of spectators assembled on the Amman airfield to see a ceremonial review of the Arab Legion.

His Majesty King Abdulla drove on to the field in an open car, preceded and followed by a trotting escort of the Arab Legion on white horses. Beside him sat His Royal Highness Prince Abdullilah, the Regent of Iraq. Five years before, he had been in our bivouac by the flooded Euphrates when the Messerschmidts roared down upon us.

I stood beside the Royal Family on the dais at the saluting-base while the Arab Legion marched past their King. First came troop behind troop of cavalry—whites, greys, chestnuts and bays. Then the Desert Patrol camelry, whom seventeen years earlier I had started to organize, in those first wild days with the Huwaitat. Some of these men were already the sons of my first recruits of 1931. Between two troops of camelmen, they bore their great desert banner.

After the camels came the infantry, who for six years had kept the peace of so much of the Middle East. They had guarded the ports, airfields and roads along which had flowed aid to Russia, troops to India and Africa, aircraft to Malaya and Australia, oil to the Allied ships and navies. As they approached the dais, they seemed in close column of platoons to form a vast sea of young faces, flashing weapons and arms swinging in unison. Then

followed the mechanized regiments, trucks, scout cars, armoured cars and guns, a seemingly unending column. The crowd cheered wildly, the bands played, the reporters jostled, the press photographers ran here and there, kneeling, crouching, standing and clicking their cameras. Thousands of young men passed the saluting-base where I stood behind their King. They went by with their heads high and their eyes gleaming, but not a muscle of their faces moved. But I knew what was in their minds. They were showing the world what Arab soldiers could do.



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